

**SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND CHILDHOOD IN THE LONG NINETEENTH
CENTURY**

by

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My dissertation argues that self-consciousness should take its place beside innocence and precocity as one of a constellation of terms crucial for understanding how paradigms of childhood and children's literature developed side by side. By focusing on attitudes towards children and self-consciousness, I illuminate the ways in which discourses for and about children affected not only children's culture but also British culture at large. My chapters examine the positive value placed on self-consciousness in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century children's literature; the reconceptualization of childhood and self-consciousness by Romantic writers, who attached a new anxiety about self-consciousness to the figure of the child; the incredible popularity of Peter Pan, which results from the eternal boy's combination of unselfconsciousness and theatricality; and the ways in which the British public school ethic of good form as well as the literary tradition of the school story reflect increasingly stringent demands that children be unselfconscious.

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PREFACE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

“[A]ll sin, my dear child, is thus formed in our hearts, sometimes long,
long before it breaks out, it becomes us therefore, carefully to watch our
thoughts...”

-Mary Martha Sherwood, *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818)¹

“As a matter of fact, the natural child is an innocent, joyous,
inconsequent thing, free from vanity, self-importance, and every form of
self-consciousness.”

-Ernest Dowson, “The Cult of the Child” (1894)²

Almost every survey of nineteenth-century British children’s literature remarks upon the inevitable presence of Mary Martha Sherwood’s *The History of the Fairchild Family* on the bookshelves of Victorian children. Though the story of the Fairchilds spanned three books written over the course of thirty years, the first volume in particular, published in 1818 and in print continuously for a century, seems to have been a fixture in the nursery. In part because of its ubiquity, when the end of the nineteenth century occasioned a host of retrospective reviews in popular periodicals of the last hundred years of children’s literature, critics tended to single out *The Fairchild Family* for especially acute condemnation. Given the post-Wordsworth reimagining of the child as a precious earthly manifestation of heavenly virtue,³ many of the criticisms leveled at Sherwood had to do with the strict Evangelicism of her text, which harped

on the natural depravity of her child characters. Most late-century detractors, for instance, pointed with horror to a scene in which Mr. Fairchild takes his young children to view the body of a man two days dead, employing the grisly spectacle as an object lesson in sin and death.⁴ It is not difficult to understand why an age dominated by the image of the child as a bright angel would shrink from such a scene. Harder to parse are the terms in which L. B. Lang, writing for *Longman's Magazine* in 1893, censures the Fairchild parents—and, by extension, real life parents who continued to provide their children with copies of *The Fairchild Family*:

One might have thought that the danger of self-consciousness arising from these perpetual religious conversations would have become obvious to the feeblest mind, but both parents appear to have regarded this unlucky habit as evidence of grace. The children are eternally watching themselves, probing themselves, writing down their bad thoughts, talking about themselves. It is Self, Self, Self from morning till night, and the more they talk about Self the more delighted their parents are....if people—and children—could forget themselves altogether, even if they sometimes forgot their faults too, both they and the world would be considerably the better. Nothing is so fatal to well-doing or well-being as the perpetual contemplation of self. But Mrs. Fairchild would consider these remarks rank heresy.⁵

Lang is not alone in this vein of criticism; a writer for *The Quarterly Review* thirty years earlier had excoriated Sherwood for her tendency to write the kind of pattern good boy who not only displays model behavior but furthermore, worse, is “able to make edifying remarks on his own conduct.”⁶ In what way is it dangerous for children’s literature to cause self-consciousness to arise in child readers? Why should a character in a child’s book not be able to reflect on his own conduct? What makes “Self, Self, Self” an apparently self-evident evil in a child’s book? Why is it desirable for children to “forget themselves altogether”? Mrs. Fairchild, and many

other parents and child-experts of the early nineteenth century, would indeed consider these remarks rank heresy, for, as I will show, they considered self-contemplation of paramount importance for children. So what changed between 1818 and 1893 to transform childhood self-consciousness from an agreed-upon good to a near-unanimously condemned evil?

This book answers that question. In constructing an answer, my book argues that “self-consciousness” must take its place beside “innocence” and “precocity” as one of a constellation of terms crucial for understanding how paradigms of childhood and children’s literature developed side by side. I intend to broaden the field of inquiry in children’s literature studies and childhood studies to include historical factors in the construction of childhood and children’s literature that have been overshadowed by a prolonged focus on Victorian preoccupations with children’s sexuality and agency. Innocence is perhaps the most frequently interrogated of the terms applied to children in popular nineteenth-century discourse. As a critical focus within childhood studies, innocence tends to highlight questions about child sexuality and the denial of adult sexual knowledge to children. As any reader of Wordsworth knows, precocity in children was a principal nineteenth-century preoccupation. But while the term precocity invites consideration of the accumulation by children of a wide range of knowledge and manners considered appropriate to adults, my dissertation focuses on one specific kind of childhood knowingness—consciousness of self.

One of the artistic achievements of the age, according to Victorian critics, was the explosion of a literature written specifically for children—what critics would later term the Golden Age of children’s literature.⁷ This explosion occasioned the kinds of retrospective surveys of earlier children’s literature mentioned above; the rapid growth of the children’s book market begged the question of what had happened over the last hundred years to create this

astonishing flood of fairy tales, fantasies, and poetry collections just for children. Again and again later-nineteenth-century adults contrasted their own paltry childhood libraries with the vast catalogues of books available for modern children.⁸ The widening horizons of the children's literature market led to a corresponding expansion in the perceived need for criticism of this literature, and a number of periodicals ran articles advising parents how to choose among the array of children's books. That childhood self-consciousness was a serious preoccupation for the Victorians is proven by the frequency with which both of these periodical genres—the survey of a century of children's literature and the review of new entries into the category—turn to considerations of whether a book, or even a genre of books, is thought to induce self-consciousness in child readers.

E. M. Field in *The Child and His Book* (1891) discouraged the circulation of children's books that were “calculated to make the child-reader sadly self-conscious.”⁹ Her fellow critics promoted narratives of fantasy and adventure as preserving a state of unselfconsciousness¹⁰ in child readers, whereas many writers rejected the kinds of domestic realism that had dominated the children's books of earlier popular authors like Maria Edgeworth and Sarah Trimmer. As early as 1860, the author of an article on “Children's Literature” in the *Quarterly Review* recommended “stories of pure imagination” over tales of home life.¹¹ Children's books were policed for content that would encourage the child to reflect on herself in relation to realistic child characters that were depicted self-consciously shaping their behavior in response to social cues. Because of the emphasis on the child's place in the social milieu, domestic stories often contained child characters that the author of “Children's Literature” found distasteful; such socially conscious protagonists, he complained, have “early learnt the art of moralizing, or of

talking with a view to being praised by good people.”¹² “We wish the little interlocutors were less self-conscious,”¹³ he lamented.

Reading fantasy, on the other hand, would deflect the “whole observant and reflective faculties” of the child from himself and instead engage the child’s imagination, through which “the thoughts of a child are carried *out* from himself”—thus avoiding “unhealthy introspection.”¹⁴ The right reading should prevent the “reflex action”¹⁵ of thought in the child, and instead direct his attention outwards. Writing twenty years after the *Quarterly Review* critic, R. L. Stevenson replicated this distinction between realism and the fantastical when he wrote disparagingly of the novel’s tendency to engage the writer in moral criticism and introspection, and praised romance for inviting readers to “be rapt clean out of ourselves.”¹⁶ Late-nineteenth-century critics overwhelmingly endorsed fairy tales for children’s reading, an endorsement they inherited from William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge,¹⁷ who recommended fairy tales because they believed the genre encouraged children to direct their thoughts outwards. Twentieth-century critics of Victorian children’s literature would take the preference for and celebration of fantasy in children’s books to be one of the great achievements of the Golden Age of children’s literature. As a result, though domestic realism maintained a strong presence in the Victorian children’s book market, the Golden Age canon minimizes the genre. One advantage of recovering and scrutinizing the cultural history of self-consciousness as a context for nineteenth-century childhood and children’s literature is that doing so illuminates the fact that the Golden Age canon leans so heavily towards the fantastical precisely because fantasy was thought to combat self-consciousness.¹⁸

Nineteenth-century views on childhood self-consciousness continued to shape responses to children’s literature into the twentieth century. Children’s literature historian Gillian Avery,

writing in 1965, invokes the tie between valuations of childhood self-consciousness and the Golden Age canon when she remarks that fantasists Dinah Maria Mulock and George MacDonald were “outstanding writers” precisely because their child characters were “natural and unselfconscious.”¹⁹ She also singles out Juliana Ewing for escaping the “fault” that marred “most domestic stories for the young” by writing “with complete lack of self-consciousness.”²⁰ But Avery does not question these designations. She, like the majority of twentieth-century critics of children’s literature, inherits but does not question the nineteenth-century use of self-consciousness—whether it belongs to the writers, characters, or readers of children’s literature—as an index for quality and canonizability. In order to recognize that it is no more natural to sort children’s literature on the basis of perceived unselfconsciousness than it is to judge it by standards of innocence requires a cultural history of the complex intertwinings of the concepts of childhood, children’s literature, and self-consciousness in the nineteenth century.

Writing such a cultural history means beginning well before the Golden Age. Accordingly, this book begins with an examination of the prehistory of the anti-self-consciousness decree, then reconstructs the complex nexus of cultural forces that created the widespread conviction that self-consciousness is bad for children, and finally illuminates some of the repercussions of that judgment on children and children’s literature. This prehistory reveals how widespread was the prescription for the young to engage in serious self-reflection, as seen, for example, in English writer Isaac Taylor’s *Advice to the Teens; or, Practical Help Towards the Formation of One’s Own Character* (1818). The youth “seriously engaging in *Self-Cultivation*,” Taylor writes, should be first and foremost “watching his own mind.”²¹ An American admirer of Taylor’s book, Lydia Maria Child wrote as a champion of abolition, women’s rights, and Indian rights, and her many works garnered her a wide audience, many of

whom would have read, in her *Mother's Book* (1831), that children “should be accustomed to look into their own hearts.”²² Literature for children from the early nineteenth century commonly depicts child characters soberly contemplating their innermost thoughts, motives, and feelings, and often discussing them with an adult interlocutor. Child readers were expected to emulate this rigorous self-examination, and, similarly, to be able to articulate their findings, often in the form of writing in a diary. Yet by 1880 the protagonists of this early children's literature were pilloried by critics of “goody-goody stories,” and the very ability to articulate his interior state disqualified the self-reflecting child character from being a child: his was an “unreal” childhood.²³ What happened between the injunction for the child to watch his own mind and the conviction that any child who does so is no child at all? In short, Romantic philosophy and poetry installed self-consciousness as the vexed defining attribute of the mature human, and they concomitantly redefined childhood as a naturally unselfconscious state.

Although critics have long identified Romantic thought as a key influence on the development of children's literature and the conceptualization of childhood, most of this scholarship focuses on the invention of “innocence” as the essence of childhood, and on the ways in which the Romantic distaste for intellectual precocity in children led to a rejection of didactic literature. This critical narrative has become the de facto explanation for the prevalence of fantasy in the Golden Age canon. According to the established story, intellectual precocity threatened the line the Romantics drew between child and adult, the Romantic ideal of the child as an innocent from birth meant a rejection of the natural depravity doctrine of Evangelical childhood, and these forces combined to sweep overtly didactic and religious literature out of the nursery and replace them with fantasy. I do not mean to challenge the veracity of this narrative. What I do mean to do is establish that Romantic writers who have already been recognized as

crucial influences on concepts of childhood—writers like Wordsworth and Coleridge—made another enormously important contribution to the history of childhood and children’s literature by exiling self-consciousness from the realm of childhood, and that this exile shaped the fantasy leanings of the Golden Age canon as much as ideas about childhood innocence and precocity.

As this book will demonstrate, establishing self-consciousness as a central concern for nineteenth-century childhood will deepen our critical understanding of the ways in which children’s literature has been written, read, and canonized. It will also shed light on the experience of childhood over the course of the nineteenth century. Additionally, this cultural history of childhood and self-consciousness will, I hope, serve to contextualize some aspects of contemporary childhood. To give one example of how this might work, we might consider the curious plight of the modern day child performer. Ken Cerniglia and Lisa Mitchell have recently written about the process of recruiting, training, and gently saying goodbye to the many child performers (casts are big and they age out quickly) who appear in Disney’s stage productions. Cerniglia is a dramaturge and literary manager for the Disney Theatrical Group, and Mitchell is the Education and Outreach Manager for the same, so they have the inside perspective on the big business of children on stage. Their article in a collection of scholarly essays on children in the entertainment business, *Entertaining Children* (2014), provides ample evidence for the longevity of a desire for the unselfconscious stage child, an ideal embodied by Peter Pan, the central figure of my third chapter. As Cerniglia and Mitchell write, “Although some degree of training is important, ideal professional child actors need to bring their natural ‘child’ selves to the stage.”²⁴ They quote a Broadway producer as stating “We want an open, kidlike spirit. If a child becomes too self-aware that they’re doing something cute—or *I’m performing now*—they lose their natural manner.”²⁵ They go on to give many more examples of directors and casting agents

expressing a desire for child actors who are “rough” and “absolutely natural” and not “slick” or “coached.”²⁶ Audiences love to see the child perform, but *must not* suspect that the child is self-consciously performing childhood itself. Performing in huge touring productions like Disney’s would be hard work for any actor, but the child actor has the added difficulty of needing to at least *seem* like they aren’t working at all. Recovering the history of self-consciousness and childhood can help us understand how children ever found themselves in such odd predicaments.

But what does “self-consciousness” mean? And why are its various conjunctions with childhood so fraught? A brief consideration of etymology will clarify my use of this key term and further reinforce the history of self-consciousness as a nineteenth century concern that I have been sketching here and will elaborate on in the chapters to come. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists two major senses of the term “self-conscious,” both of which bear out my assertion that self-consciousness is valorized or neutral in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, but becomes a much more complex matter beginning with the Romantic period and the work of writers including Rousseau, Schiller, Wordsworth and Coleridge. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the first sense of “self-conscious” as having “consciousness of one's identity, one's actions, sensations, etc.; reflectively aware of one's actions.” This is the philosophical sense of the word, and the quotations the *Oxford English Dictionary* provides in support of this definition makes it clear that in earliest usage being self-conscious marked humans as higher beings set apart from the rest of nature. Thus seventeenth-century theologian Ralph Cudworth’s *Treatise of Freewill* is quoted as maintaining that the human ability to reflect upon ourselves is “a reduplication of life in a higher degree,” the very thing that brings us closer to God than the rest of animal life.²⁷

This unambiguously positive sense of “self-conscious” arose with the concept of a self in the late seventeenth century, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies as the origin point of the modern philosophical sense of the self: “That which in a person is really and intrinsically *he* (in contradistinction to what is adventitious); the ego (often identified with the soul or mind as opposed to the body); a permanent subject of successive and varying states of consciousness.” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the very earliest uses in Germanic languages of “self” was to indicate identity, or sameness, as in “the man himself,” that particular man and no other. It could also be used in reference to materials to indicate their un-mixed nature, as in the case of unblended whisky, or a piece of clothing in which the trim is made of the same material as the rest of the garment. The *Oxford English Dictionary* speculates that eventually the grammatical meaning of “herself” shifted to “her self,” in which possession was implied—she has a self, the self belongs to her. Here begins the split wherein she and her self are identical but somehow divided into two nouns. That split is the genesis of the whole Romantic problematization of self-consciousness.

The early positive valence of “self-conscious,” which positioned man just below God in the great chain of being, dominated throughout the eighteenth century and into the early nineteenth century, confirming, as it did, the rational humanism of the Enlightenment. John Locke, arguably the most influential of Enlightenment thinkers in England, concurred that self-consciousness made humans closer to God than to the animals.²⁸ This valorizing sense of self-consciousness also dovetailed nicely with Evangelicism’s association of nature with sin and personal salvation with stringent self-examination, pairings readily apparent in the first epigraph to this introduction. In the passage from Sherwood’s *Fairchild Family*, Lucy’s mother assures her that her natural inclinations are sinful, and that only by carefully watching her heart can she

fight that nature. Romantic philosophy, however, maintained self-consciousness as the essence of humanity, but re-evaluated the split between human and nature, and the split within the self-reflecting self, finding in these divisions two sources of tragic alienation that haunted humanity. The second sense of “self-conscious” listed by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the negative sense, arises with the latter end of the Romantic period: “Marked by undue or morbid pre-occupation with one's own personality.” The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s first citation for this sense is from an 1834 letter written by J. S. Mill, in which he postulates that he has cured himself of the disease of self-consciousness, an “irrepressible” plague that he wrote about at length in his autobiography.²⁹ By the time Mill published the autobiography in 1873, he hardly even needed to explain *why* self-consciousness might be considered a disease: that it was one was a readily recognizable cultural truth.

Though in chapter two I will delve much more deeply into the work of Romantic thinkers who effected this shift, for now it will be useful to briefly outline the ways in which self-consciousness was troubling for writers like Wordsworth and Friedrich Schiller, and later Mill and Thomas Carlyle, and how those concerns shaped concepts of childhood as well as children’s literature. In the eighteenth century the division of man from nature inherent in the definition of self-consciousness had supported dominant views of the privileged superiority of man over nature. This definitional split between man and nature came to seem less felicitous later, when, for instance, the Lake Poets idealized nature, and envisioned humanity’s alienation from it as a state of fallen-ness from an originary unity between man and nature. In addition, in a perplexing sense self-consciousness makes one both subject and object of one’s own reflection. This internal division engendered discomfort about alienation from oneself, and threatened the self-conscious subject, who makes of herself an object, with thingliness. Perhaps this threat of the subject with

object status accounts for the extremely frequent association of the term “morbid” with the term “self-conscious”³⁰: mere things do not live. Also suggested by the association with “morbid” in that second *Oxford English Dictionary* definition (“undue or morbid pre-occupation with one's own personality”) self-consciousness came to be understood as a melancholy, brooding form of self-absorption, which cut the brooder off from healthy social interaction and created another form of isolation. In short, self-consciousness constructed a subject alienated from nature, from himself, and from other subjects. The same Romantic writers who articulated these dire concerns—as I will explore at length in chapter two—invented a developmental narrative of human life in which children lived in a state of total unselfconsciousness—and thus total unity with nature, self, and others—and only with the onset of adulthood did they too fall into a self-conscious state. Thus a number of Romantic writers made unselfconsciousness a defining characteristic of true childhood, and initiated an anxious sense that childhood unselfconsciousness could be undone prematurely by, among other threats, the wrong reading.

Paradoxically, while self-consciousness threatened to inhibit social connection, it could also foster too much dependence on social ties. In other words, anxiety about self-consciousness could point either inward or outward. The nineteenth century experienced anxiety about the tendency of self-consciousness to lead to a preoccupation with the inner self that cuts the self off from the community. But they were also anxious about the possibility that self-consciousness would engender in individuals a preoccupation with how one is judged by outward social norms, by others, and thus create a lack of autonomy. The nineteenth century valorized autonomy and authenticity, and self-consciousness could imply an over-concern with shaping oneself as an object of the regard of others. It is this concern we should hear when Edward Salmon, writer of several articles on children's literature in the late nineteenth century, singles out Maria

Edgeworth's tales of domestic realism for particular scorn, calling them a "bane rather than a boon to young minds" because they encouraged children to jump "from the nursery to take part in the full *regime* of the drawing-room."³¹ Too early an entrance into the social world of the drawing-room jeopardized the authentic self of the child, Salmon and many others worried. A child who learned too soon to shape herself self-consciously to meet social approval would succumb to a life of inauthentic social mummery. To prevent this ill outcome, writers not only implored parents to keep children out of actual drawing-room situations but also recommended keeping drawing-room scenes out of children's literature.

In the chapters to come I will argue that this push to protect children from self-consciousness was primarily motivated by an adult desire to improve adult life. Self-consciousness could potentially alienate one from others. In addition it could lead to self-alienating revelations: I do not know myself; I know my behavior to be in some ways an inauthentic expression of my true inner self; I have developed a habit of seeing myself as an object rather than a subject. Self-consciousness, then, potentially leaves the subject alienated from everyone *including* himself. No wonder the supposed unselfconsciousness of childhood has held such an attraction. If nineteenth-century adults could imagine themselves to have been, at one time, alienated neither from themselves nor from others because of the simple fact that as children they were unaware of themselves *as selves*, then they could hope for the restoration of this unalienated state. By assuring that self-consciousness arrived only at the proper point in the developmental timeline of the young, concerned adults hoped to build a society of more authentic individuals. This is the hope that prompts Rousseau to write his monumental educational fantasy-cum-treatise, *Émile* (1762).

The structure of my book begs some explanation. The first two chapters range widely over a disparate networks of texts, collecting and collating treatises on education, conduct handbooks, religious tracts, theater reviews, and more in order to outline a shifting consensus on notions concerning childhood, self-consciousness, and children's literature. These early chapters turn to close readings of children's diaries (chapter one) and children's books (chapter two) relatively briefly. The latter two chapters continue to cast a wide net for evidence, but rely more substantially on close readings of either one crucial text—the Peter Pan narratives in chapter three—or a series of texts representative of a crucial genre—the school stories of chapter four. The tendency toward overviews of broad discourse archives earlier in the book results from my conviction that thin description³² (that is, describing texts in detail, but without strenuous interpretation) of a discourse is a way of taking seriously the stated beliefs and intentions of a historical moment. In other words, I first want to know what the Evangelicals or the Lake poets or German philosophers were saying right there on the surface.³³ The close readings, then, turn to thick description to understand more fully how the discourse of one period—the early nineteenth century—came to undergird the representations, ideals, and expectations of childhood in another—the later nineteenth century.

Though I value and employ thick description—in other words, close reading that situates a text within particular, not necessarily obvious, historical contexts—I do hope to avoid inhabiting the role of the critic-as-hero that has recently been correlated with the practice of thick description within literary criticism. This self-assumed critical role has come under fire from a variety of dissenting writers who follow Bruno Latour in a general critique of critical hermeneutics within the humanities.³⁴ The critic-as-hero operates under the hermeneutics of suspicion, using close reading either to out the text that doesn't know what it says, or to outsmart

the text that sets out to hide its nefarious purposes behind a mask of good intentions—or both. Though I'm wary of this suspicious, antagonistic orientation towards texts, I do recognize that sometimes the text wears a mask constructed by the exigencies of time or audience, and a critical unmasking is called for in order to recover meanings that simply aren't easily accessible. After all, my starting conviction in this book is that in order to recognize that preferring unselfconsciousness in both children and children's books is neither a natural nor an ahistorical phenomenon, we must recover a history that has up until now gone unnoticed or un-interrogated. Thick description allows me to recover the many contexts and histories that don't float on the surface of texts because they seem, by the late nineteenth century, to go without saying, or to be difficult to say without alienating one's audience. Perhaps, for instance, Barrie's charming but sad Peter Pan was the best way he could say that holding ideals of childhood unselfconsciousness might make for beautiful art and good philosophical shortcuts, but it amounts to wishing children were dead. Walking out on stage with that bald pronouncement would have cost him his career; embedded in the play and the novel, the statement becomes a mood, a nagging doubt, a critique sunk deep in delight that requires, at this remove especially, thick description to bring it to the surface.

For many years critics produced almost exclusively thin description of children's literature. Early scholarship in the field, from the Victorian period through the mid-twentieth century, provided historical details about authors and the trade in children's books, and outlined a particular view of the development of children's literature as an exercise in canon-building, but rarely engaged in sustained analysis of particular texts as objects of literary-critical interest. For example, in the preface to his widely-cited *Children's Books in England* (1932), which stood for much of the twentieth century as the standard work on children's literature, F. J. Harvey Darton

described his book not as an effort of literary criticism, but as a “minor chapter in the history of English social life.”³⁵ In the mid-twentieth century, adherents to the New Criticism were insisting that literary texts, with their complex systems of meaning, demanded scrupulous, exacting analysis. To use the terms at hand, the New Criticism advocated thicker descriptions of how the text functioned as an aesthetic object. Yet very few scholars were turning that kind of focused attention to children’s literature. In part the descriptions failed to thicken for so long because children’s literature was thought too simplistic to require explication. The canon of children’s literature, built over the course of the twentieth century by readers, writers, and scholars fully under the sway of the ideal of unselfconscious childhood, was organized on the criteria that children’s literature was, like childhood, transparent, self-evident, and unselfconscious. That criteria also happened to exclude it from the realm of rigorous literary criticism, which was aimed at texts deemed complex, self-conscious, and opaque. Tellingly, when in 1972 Francelia Butler founded the first academic journal on the subject, *Children’s Literature*, she subtitled it *The Great Excluded*.

One consequence of the rise, in the 1980s, of what has variously been called symptomatic, suspicious, or paranoid reading³⁶ is that the insistence that *all* texts were shaped by and participated in the construction of complex cultural systems led more scholars to cast a critical eye on corners of the literary landscape hitherto ignored by rigorous academic literary criticism, including criticism of children’s literature. And although the critical work that has resulted from that fresh perspective on children’s texts has helped to denaturalize much of what had been taken for granted about the character of childhood and its books, including their axiomatic simplicity and transparency, a healthy dose of suspicion is still a useful critical tool for scholars of children’s literature simply because the texts under scrutiny are the founding

documents of so many of our received truths about childhood. By employing both thin description (or surface reading, reading with the grain) and thick description (or close reading, reading against the grain), I hope to benefit from the best of both critical practices while also avoiding their respective weaknesses: the possibility of stubborn naiveté in regards to thin description, and the dangers of self-congratulating, paranoid criticism on the part of thick description.

I begin with a chapter that establishes a prehistory to the anti-self-consciousness sentiment that dominated most of the nineteenth century. This chapter demonstrates that late in the Georgian period, experts on childhood from Enlightenment philosopher John Locke to educational reformer Sarah Trimmer actually *encouraged* self-examination and sober reflection in children in order to usher them into rational adulthood or religious salvation—or both. An examination of texts for children from this era—including Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess* (1749), Maria Edgeworth’s *Early Lessons* (1801), and Ellenor Fenn’s *The Fairy Spectator* (1789)—demonstrates that children’s literature, often using the emblem of the mirror, urged children to reflect on themselves in order to perfect their own behavior. The chapter then turns to explore an archive of children’s diaries in order to examine how children responded to the prescription to review their own thoughts and actions as part of a program of rigorous self-cultivation.

The second chapter charts the course from a widespread understanding that self-consciousness is good for children to a re-theorization of self-consciousness as bad for children. This chapter analyzes the work of writers such as Schiller, Heinrich von Kleist, Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Coleridge in order to show that, at the same time that Romantic thought situated self-consciousness as the defining center of human subjectivity, childhood was re-

defined as a pre-self-conscious stage of incubation for the developing self. To reveal how this emerging description of childhood quickly became, in fact, a prescription for children to be—or at least seem to be—unselfconscious, the chapter considers two transitional works of children’s literature. Close readings of Catherine Sinclair’s *Holiday House* (1839) and Harriet Mozley’s *The Fairy Bower* (1841) show that while both books retain some pre-Romantic sense that children should engage in self-reflection, they also expose a newly emerging consensus that childhood should exist as an Edenic state before the fall into self-consciousness.

In the third chapter I take up one of the complex outcomes of the Romantic re-evaluation of childhood self-consciousness: the phenomenon of Peter Pan. This chapter acknowledges the uneven development of attitudes regarding childhood self-consciousness by tracing in the Victorian period a cultural tension between a commonly expressed predilection for the unconscious child and a similarly prevalent celebration of the theatrical child, often understood as a figure of consummate self-consciousness. After mapping an increasing Victorian anxiety about self-consciousness through the writings of Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill, and tracing the effect of this mounting worry in the burgeoning field of children’s literature, I argue that the incredible popularity of Peter Pan, both on the page and on the stage, should be understood as a result of his ability to satisfy seemingly antithetical cultural demands, to embody an impossible ideal for his audience—artfulness without self-consciousness.

My last chapter engages the British public school in order to illustrate the effects—both on literature and on actual children—of the increasingly strident disavowal of childhood self-consciousness. This chapter examines the particularly public school formation referred to as “good form,” an ethic of behavior and being that demands both perfect manner and perfect unselfconsciousness. Charting the development of the school story genre—one of the most

popular subsets of nineteenth-century children's literature—from *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) to *The Loom of Youth* (1917), the chapter demonstrates this literature's exposure of the incredible psychic demands that the doctrine of good form imposed on public schoolboys, and also displays the genre's own self-conscious anxiety about the impossibility of representing good form without being in bad form. This closing chapter reveals that by the end of the Edwardian period, the anxiety about childhood self-consciousness had mounted into a concern that prescribing unselfconsciousness for children might in fact be self-defeating.

Finally, my epilogue briefly highlights one of the ways in which the nineteenth century's verdict against childhood self-consciousness continues to shape our thinking about children. I contend that psychoanalysis is built upon the assumption that childhood is a period of unselfconsciousness. Psychoanalysis requires an occluded history of the self that childhood self-consciousness would obviate. The work of the analyst is to lead the patient to a revelatory understanding of the self commonly predicated on a retrospective consideration of a childhood that could not be consciously comprehended as it happened. The adult becomes conscious of what the child could not have been—the self. Thus one of the pre-eminent discourses of selfhood in the twentieth and twenty-first century has been erected on the foundation of a theory of the unselfconsciousness of children, the invention and effects of which my dissertation traces over the course of the long nineteenth century.

At the end of the twentieth century, the mantra most repeated to American children was “Be Yourself.” It is a fundamentally twentieth-century thing to say to a child. It assumes that the child already has a fully-formed, unique self. “Be Yourself” presumes also that the child's self is effortlessly knowable to the child. Most strangely, the command imagines that the child is in danger of being someone else. How is the child to know when she is being herself and when she

is not? What kind of bizarre ontological proposition is this? If “Be Yourself” is the bewildering ontological demand made on children of the twentieth century, “Forget Yourself” was the similarly baffling epistemological demand on children of the nineteenth century. As a 1891 child-rearing manual notes, telling a child to “Forget Yourself” only leads to more thinking about the self, and in fact the harder the child tries to forget the more painfully self-conscious he is likely to become.³⁷ “Forget Yourself” was a weird and paradoxical command issued to the children of the nineteenth century, and its effects were often weird and paradoxical as well—as this study will show.

2.0 EXCHANGING MASKS FOR MIRRORS: THE SELF-CONSCIOUS CHILD IN THE LATE GEORGIAN ERA

The mask is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself.

---Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (1968)³⁸

The mirror continues to provide a way toward self-examination.

---Benjamin Goldberg, *The Mirror and Man* (1985)³⁹

Before Romantic writers inspired a nearly culture-wide revulsion for self-consciousness in children, theorists of childhood in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century held quite the opposite opinion regarding the matter. They sought to awaken and cultivate self-consciousness in children. Children's authors of the period, such as Maria Edgeworth, Mary Sherwood, and Hannah More, offered explicitly didactic texts that often aimed to induce a state of constant self-reflection in child readers, who were asked to examine their thoughts, their behavior, and the state of their souls. In other words, children's literature in some of its most influential early incarnations intended to cultivate self-consciousness in children as a step towards rational adulthood and as a primary Christian virtue, an accounting of the self that would lead children onto the path of righteousness. Adults urged children to use books as mirrors that would help

them peer deep into themselves, reveal their inmost being, and correct any faults in what they found.

This chapter will provide a prehistory to what became common sense by the end of the nineteenth-century: that children's literature should *prevent* the growth of self-consciousness in child readers. This prehistory will show that prior to the denigration of self-conscious childhood, the trope of the book-as-mirror grew out of a widespread belief that self-consciousness was crucial to an optimal childhood. The mirror was not only a metaphor for the child's book; it also figured as an emblem in many tales for children, literalizing the injunction to the child reader to use the book to scrutinize her self. Children were also encouraged to keep diaries that would inculcate further self-reflection, and this chapter will examine a number of extant children's diaries from the period in order to consider how children responded to this particular prescription.⁴⁰

While I will argue that there was in fact a highly significant shift from the turn-of-the-century emphasis on the importance of self-scrutiny for children to the later-nineteenth-century rejection of self-conscious childhood, I will also trace the ways in which the seeds of the Romantic discomfort with self-consciousness were already present in the earlier ways of thinking about children and their capacity for self-reflection. Not all forms of self-consciousness were positively valued during this pre-Romantic period of upholding self-reflection as a childhood virtue. In the latter decades of the eighteenth century, even before the particularly Romantic discomfort with self-consciousness in children took hold of the English, even as self-examination, sober reflection, self-discipline, and the deliberate imitation of literary model-children were modes of self-consciousness actively encouraged in children, other forms of self-consciousness were reviled in the young. Most frequently late-century authors term this

negatively charged self-consciousness “affectation,” and the discourse surrounding children and affectation foreshadows the full-blown devaluation of self-conscious childhood that Chapter Two will examine at length.

2.1 BEFORE THE MIRROR, THE MASK

First, at the risk of an infinite regress, we should consider the prehistory of the prehistory. A brief meditation on children’s relationships to books before the book-as-mirror model took hold will illuminate the importance of the late-eighteenth century for making conscious reflection on a deep-seated selfhood a concern for childhood for the first time. Before children’s reading encouraged them to take up the mirror, books taught children something very different: how to wear the mask. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century some of the relatively few books aimed at the young were conduct manuals, which provided detailed instructions on polite behavior for those striving to maintain or, more likely, improve their social standing. This advice literature grew out of an early modern tradition of courtesy books, but unlike those guidebooks for court life, the conduct manuals of the seventeenth and eighteenth century shifted the audience to the expanding middle classes.⁴¹ Books like Adam Petrie’s *Rules of Good Deportment, or of Good Breeding* (1720) and Reverend Wettenhall’s *Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (1740) brought the possibility of self-fashioning, already available to the elite, down to the much larger ranks of the professional and merchant classes. Stephen Greenblatt has established that “in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process.”⁴² Greenblatt’s representative early modern figures, however, are exceptional for their time: artists and statesmen and courtiers.

For the general public, self-fashioning did not become a common concern—even a possibility—until later.

Partly responsible for extending the art of self-fashioning to a larger population, the conduct books explicitly described the self as an artifice even when targeting the young, as in the case of Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son on Men and Manners* (1744), published twelve times between 1774 and 1803 alone. The book, comprised of letters the famous statesman wrote to his illegitimate son over the course of his illustrious life, became a standard handbook for middle-class consumption. It focuses on politeness and decorum, on perfecting the social mask so as to be well-received and at ease in any company. Lord Chesterfield advises "due attention to the manners of people of fashion," which will enable the reader to imitate successfully their habits, speech, and appearance. The aim is to act genteel so as to be taken as a gentleman, and the advice indicates that success lies less in perfecting some inner nature and more in paying scrupulous attention to the effect of one's exterior. For example, Chesterfield cautions against using common proverbs, "which are so many proofs of having kept bad and low company."⁴³ He also points out that a "man of sense" is just as assertive as an impudent man, only he has "art enough to give an outward air of modesty to all he does."⁴⁴ This is a type of self-consciousness, but not one concerned with the deep self. The conduct manual constructed a sense self-fashioning as an outward-directed process of crafting and seamlessly wearing a social mask. The inside mattered much less than the outside—if it mattered at all.

The emphasis on outward manifestations over inner truths explains why rules from early modern courtesy books written for members of the court, like *The Babees Book* and *The Boke of Nature*, were reprinted in eighteenth century conduct manuals for middle class youths, like John Garretson's *The School of Manners, or, Rules for Children's Behaviour: At Church, at Home, at*

Table, in Company, in Discourse, at School, abroad, and among Boys (1701). Young readers were assured that they need only memorize and enact rules of aristocratic deportment (such as “Sing not nor hum in thy mouth while thou art in company”) in order to achieve greater social stature. If you wear the mask of gentility perfectly, these books promise, you will achieve the status of gentility.⁴⁵ The reader is enjoined not to perfect an inner self but to perfect his performance of an artificial role. Indeed, the preface to *Present for an Apprentice; or, A Sure Guide to Esteem and an Estate* (1740), written by former Lord Mayor of London John Barnard and addressed to his son, explains that the book is intended to help the reader enter “gracefully on the Stage of the World” by teaching him to act his part well, “in order to come off with Applause”—as open an acknowledgement of artificiality and other-directed self-fashioning as one could ask for.⁴⁶ Likewise, with its copious language of gilding, varnishing, painting, hiding, and disguising, the *Rules of Good Deportment* makes clear that its maxims construct an outward self, an artful bit of theater—without much concern for what lies beneath the meticulously fabricated mask.

If conduct literature encouraged children to take up not mirrors but masks, affectation was still, even at this early stage, a concern, albeit with a different valence than it would take on at the end of the eighteenth century. Writing in the late seventeenth century, John Locke defines affectation as “an awkward and forced imitation of what should be genuine and easy, wanting the beauty that accompanies what is natural.”⁴⁷ Importantly, for Locke, the awkwardness of affectation results from an insufficient education in which the pupil is taught the theory of fashionable manners and conversation without being required to practice them until they become natural. In other words, affectation is not a result of role-playing in general; rather it is an effect of an imperfect performance. The performance needs to be improved, not abandoned.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, many commentators condemned all performance as an affectation that destroyed unselfconscious simplicity. Sarah Trimmer, in the *Guardian of Education* (1802-6), the first English periodical dedicated to advising parents on the matter of children's literature and arguably the beginning point of a canon of English children's literature, declares Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son* "a very dangerous book, unfit for the perusal of youth" because of the "fatal experience" of many "who, while they have been studying in it the *science of the graces*, or, in other words, a system of *artificial manners, devoid of religious or moral principle*, have made shipwreck of their sincerity and virtue."⁴⁸ Similarly, she objects to M. Berquin's suggestion in the preface to *The Childrens' Friend* (*sic*) that children should be encouraged to come forward and be made easy in adult company:

[O]n the contrary, they rather require, according to our idea, to be *kept back*, to prevent their losing that *graceful bashfulness* which is natural to the child who is taught to look up with reverence and respect to his superiors in age and knowledge; and which, so far from being a disadvantage to childhood, is one of the greatest charms of that age of innocent simplicity.⁴⁹

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was a commonplace that good reading encouraged children to develop their reflection and self-discipline—positively valued forms of self-consciousness—while bad reading fed the growth of affectation—a negatively valued forms of self-consciousness which by this point included any hint of artifice. The self as theater, as mask, was out; the authentic self, the inner nature, was in.

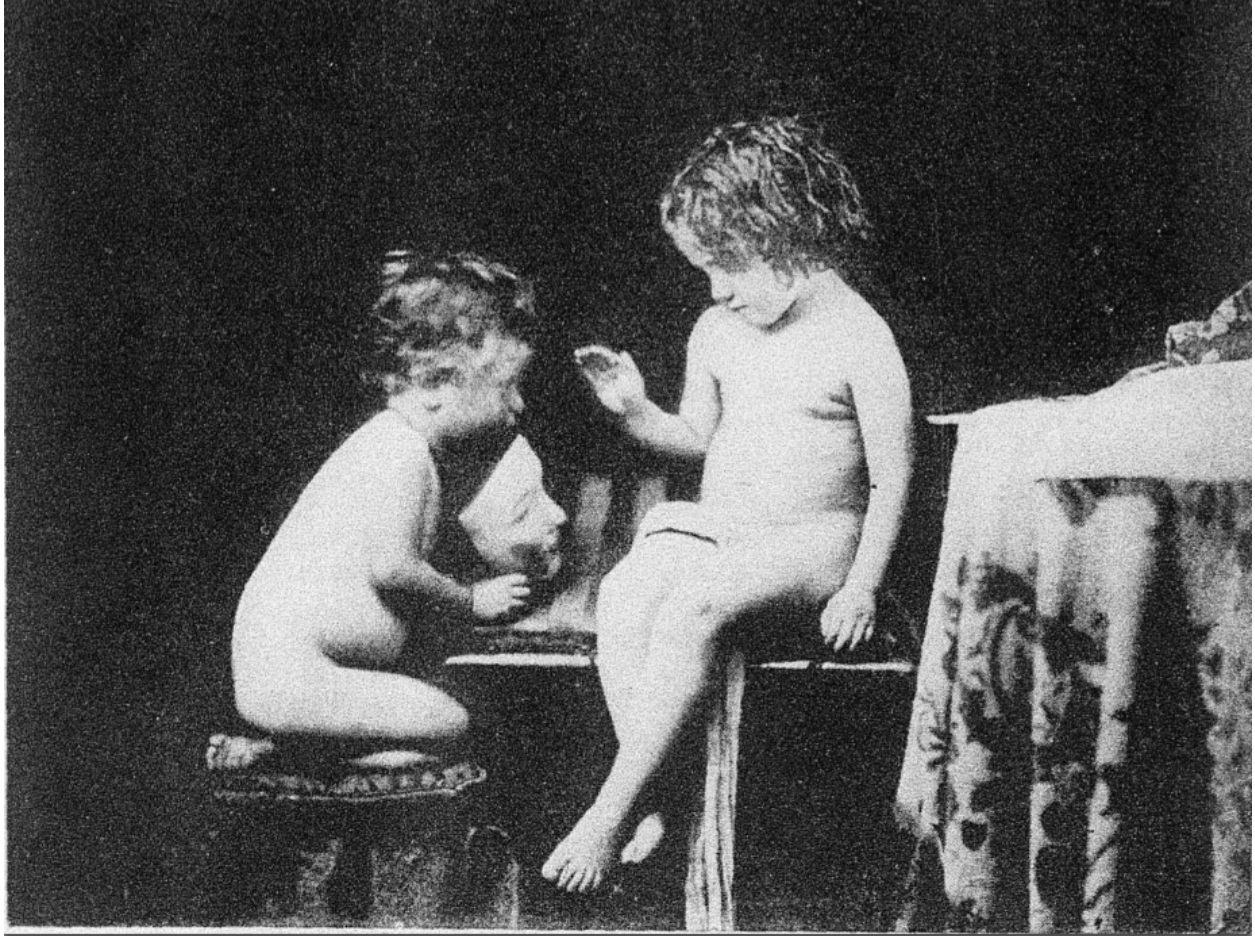


Figure 1: “Children Playing with a Mask,” O.G. Rejlander (1894).⁵⁰ The older, wiser, more loftily seated child motions to the younger to put down the mask.

The shift from an open embrace of the artifice of self-fashioning in conduct manuals read by children to a subsequent rejection of artifice and elevation of earnest, inward-directed self-scrutiny is vividly illustrated in a story provided by William Mavor in his *Youth's Miscellany* of 1798. Titled “The Dangerous Consequences of Encouraging a Theatric Taste in Youth,” the tale recounts the history of a merchant’s daughter who gets so wrapped up in the theater that she nearly marries an actor—an outcome that Mavor lets his readers know would be nothing short of disastrous. Poor Clarinda Hartley is infected by mere exposure to the artifice of the theater: “The tender mind easily assimilates itself to the objects before it: I soon caught the rage of imitation,

and the flame of emulation; encouragement fanned the passion of my soul, and praise animated me to endeavour at excellence.”⁵¹ Like the readers of conduct manuals before her, Clarinda seeks social approval by constructing a highly artificial performance of self. Flattered by actors, whose “good opinion I regarded as the highest eulogium,” she comes to believe that she too has acting talent and goes so far as to build a theater in her own home.⁵² The text’s suspicion of flattery and its connection with insincere performance echoes, as we will see, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s warnings in *Émile* (1762) that exposing the child to flattery plants “the germs of artificiality,” which are the enemy of “self-knowledge and self-control, the arts of life and happiness.”⁵³ Indeed, it is the newly valued self-conscious art of reflection—an avenue to the self-knowledge exalted by Rousseau—that saves Clarinda from an irreversible immersion in the theater through marriage to an actor. The suitor favored by her father writes a poem in which he laments that Clarinda has “stoop[ed] to art.”⁵⁴ Reading the poem is a sobering experience for Clarinda, and as “To be grave is to reflect,” the missive sparks a crisis of conscience in which she vows to swear off the theater and marry the young merchant-poet.⁵⁵ Clarinda is infected by one form of self-consciousness—seeking approval from fashionable society through performance—but receives an antidote in the form of another kind of self-consciousness—self-reflection brought on by an act of reading. Good self-consciousness combats the now thoroughly disreputable art of self-fashioning.

In part these shifts in ways of thinking about children’s self-cultivation may have been a result of the emergence of a new form of subjectivity in the late-eighteenth century, an emergence traced in Dror Wahrman’s *Making of the Modern Self* (2004). Wahrman argues that between the “immortal soul as self” paradigm of the pre-eighteenth-century West—shared by everyone from medieval Catholics to seventeenth-century Puritans—and the “deep interiority as

self” paradigm the modern world inherited from the Romantics, there were eighty years or so in the eighteenth century during which the English seemed to have an epistemological moment that looks terribly postmodern from today’s perspective but explains the frank embrace of artifice in the conduct manuals: namely, England in the early to middle eighteenth-century thought of the self as outwardly-directed, as performative, as a shifting assumption of types in response to social cues.

By tracing the history of a few prominent identity categories—gender, race, and human versus animal—over the course of the eighteenth century, Wahrman demonstrates that during the first eighty years of the century these categories were fairly fluid, one emblem for which is the popularity of the masquerade ball, a form of entertainment that delights in the mutability of identity.⁵⁶ However, in the last two decades of the century, identity categories began to grow much more rigid, and the masquerade ball fell out of vogue. In short, selfhood entered a process of stabilization at the end of the century. Of course, in terms of self-development, the shift from conceiving subjectivity as essentially mutable to believing it to be essentially stable switched the cultural emphasis from becoming the self one wants to be—donning the right mask and wearing it convincingly—to discovering what self one has, knowing its faults, and continuously, forever striving to correct them—studying oneself in the mirror, no masks involved. It is no accident, then, that Clarinda finds the poem about the ills of performance inside a mask that has been pointedly positioned on a statue of Mercury in her garden. The medium, in that case, is the message. Both the mask and mutable Mercury were emblems of what Wahrman calls the *ancien régime* of identity, the sense of the identity as something to be artfully shaped to court social success. Mavor’s self-theatricalizing Clarinda is being warned that by 1798 a new regime is taking hold, and the mask must be discarded.

Instead of perfecting one's performance, late-eighteenth-century English literature insisted, one should be practicing self-reflection in order to perfect the authentic inner self. Thus children, rather than being taught to assimilate fashionable manners, were asked at the end of the eighteenth century to shun artificiality (bad self-consciousness) and embrace quiet reflection (good self-consciousness). In agreeing that children should look inward, and that their reading should help them to do so, these various late eighteenth-century schools of thought on childhood sought to inculcate self-consciousness in children, and sought to do so using children's literature as a key tool. Children were asked to exchange masks for mirrors, and some of those mirrors took the forms of the books they were given to read, while others took the form of blank books they were asked to fill out with their own reflections on their worlds and their selves.

2.2 THE BOOK AS MIRROR

Self-conscious reflection was necessary for both the development of the intellect and the salvation of the soul. The Puritans, who were, according to Mary Jackson, the most influential group in directing the early juvenile book trade, had brought to children's reading an insistence on private spiritual reflection.⁵⁷ As D. W. Bebbington emphasizes, the Puritans, painfully preoccupied with attaining some assurance of salvation, dealt with doubt through "rigorous self-examination."⁵⁸ James Janeway's *A Token for Children* (1671), depicting thirteen ecstatic deaths of exemplarily pious children, demonstrates the need for children to engage in private reflection in the name of ultimate salvation. Little Sarah Howley, first up in the litany of child mortality, retires to a private chamber to weep and search her heart immediately after coming home from the sermon that began her spiritual conversion. Through such private reflection she is "made

deeply sensible of the condition of her Soul”; self-consciousness is one of the first stops on the road to achieving Salvation.⁵⁹

This emphasis on self-reflection, not confined to the Puritans but rather a general feature of Protestant culture, coincided with the middle-class practice of prudent business strategies to create a discourse and practice of spiritual accounting, in which one casts up one’s accounts with God through habitual self-examination, often recording sins and good deeds in a journal just as one would record expenses and profits in a ledger, or even making and filling out checklists to help distinguish between “sanctifying” and mere “temporary” grace.⁶⁰ Just like their elders, Protestant children were required to account for their souls, and one method of encouraging the child to keep tabs on her spiritual state was to give her books featuring model children like Little Sarah Howley against whom to measure herself. Children were to observe the model children of late-eighteenth-century children’s literature, reflect upon their own character in comparison, and, hopefully, improve as a result of this self-conscious endeavor. Trimmer insisted that encouraging serious reflection from childhood on, particularly that directed inward, was of national importance: “In order to a national reformation, every individual must look first at home, and be intent upon mending *himself*; for which purpose, there should be a deliberate and close inspection into our own hearts and ways.”⁶¹ Through her work on the *Guardian*, Trimmer sought to identify and champion works that included fictional children who modeled this positively valued form of self-conscious reflection, thus encouraging self-reflection on the part of child readers.⁶² The injunction to consider a model may seem to echo the conduct book. But while Lord Chesterfield and the other conduct manual authors focused on polishing outward manners, writers in this new tradition focused on molding a deep-seated and mostly

private self into the best possible shape. The conduct book urged imitation of an exterior; the new children's literature encouraged children self-conscious reflection on and perfection of something invisible but of monumental importance; the true, inner self.

An early model of self-conscious reflection was an adult character in a book meant primarily for adult readers but, with Rousseau's singular approval, appropriated by the nursery. Daniel Defoe's hero Robinson Crusoe, upon first going to sea, gets seasick and for seemingly the first time in his life spends some time in self-reflection:

I began now seriously to reflect upon what I had done, and how justly I was overtaken by the judgment of Heaven for my wicked leaving my father's house, and abandoning my duty; all the good counsel of my parents, my father's tears and my mother's entreaties came now fresh into my mind, and my conscience, which was not yet come to the pitch of hardness which it has been since, reproach'd me with the contempt of advice, and the breach of my duty to God and my father (9).⁶³

First, note how closely reflection is tied to conscience—as though the conscience were the muscle and reflection were the exercise thereof. Second, note that reflection comes out of adversity; indeed, Crusoe abandons it as soon as he recovers from his seasickness. But of course he soon finds himself in a near-constant state of peril when shipwrecked on his island, a time of hardship during which he embraces reflection through writing in a journal, including a two-column “Evil” and “Good” entry, an act of accounting both material (“I have not clothes to cover me”) and spiritual (“he that miraculously saved me from death, can deliver me from this condition”—the “condition” being at once the states of both mortal peril and sin), and a model for the account books kept by some children (54). More reflection during an illness leads him to existential questions—“What is this earth and sea of which I have seen so much, whence is it

produced, and what am I, and all the other creatures, wild and tame, human and brutal, whence are we?”—which ultimately lead him to God (74). He is “struck dumb” with his reflections, and has “not a word to say, no not to answer my self” (75). Self-reflection alone is not enough; ultimately it is just a step on the path to answers from God. But by the time his ink starts running out, he has established an observation of the Sabbath, so that his journal can be limited to writing down “only the most remarkable events...without continuing a daily *memorandum* of other things” like his thoughts (83). Through self-conscious reflection and diary-keeping Crusoe reaches salvation and sets an example for doing so for generations of child readers.

Evangelical writer Hannah More takes up the pattern established by Defoe in her story “The History of Tom White” in *Tales for the Common People*, one entry in her series of tracts meant for working-class adults and children alike. After being thrown from his horse during a carriage crash caused by his own recklessness in showing off, Tom has a long convalescence to reflect on how he has been going to the bad—much like Crusoe during his sea-sickness on the first voyage. He comes to see his accident as a “happy affliction,” for “long sickness and solitude gave him time to reflect on his past life,” repent, and improve.⁶⁴ More wanted readers to submit to self-reflection now and not wait for an illness, when it might be too late to repent; Tom, after all, only narrowly avoids a death which would have left him heading to the afterlife in a dubious spiritual state. More believed all youth to originate in a dubious spiritual state from which self-reflection could lead them to God and salvation. “Histories” like that of Tom White could encourage readers to engage in such self-reflection.

The conservative Christian women writing specifically for children and about children’s literature at the turn of the century strongly valued self-conscious spiritual accounting. In the

Guardian, Sarah Trimmer, despite some misgivings, praised the work of Madame de Genlis in such a way that makes it clear she believed that children's reading should lead to self-conscious reflection:

We can readily believe that the Author has, as she professes, drawn from the life, for all the characters she gives are to be frequently met with among children; and she has described them in such lively colours, as cannot fail, we think, of leading young readers to the consciousness of their own particular faults, and to such an observation of the failings or amiable qualities of their young companions, as will conduce to the forming of their own characters to whatever is good and praiseworthy.⁶⁵

The nicely delineated characters of the children's story should motivate readers to engage in the self-conscious formation of their own selves in accordance to what they learn about good and bad qualities from their reading. In her own most popular book for children, *Fabulous Histories* (1786), Trimmer's child characters are asked repeatedly by their parents to reflect upon themselves—on their difference from the animals they lovingly observe, for instance, or on their own behavior generally—an invitation extended implicitly to young readers. Her use of natural observation as a starting point for self-conscious reflection extends the pattern established by Anna Laetitia Barbauld in her *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781): first, the observation of nature through sensory impression; second, a reflection on divine truths brought about through these observations. This pattern is also the pattern of Lockean education—sensory observation of the outside world leading to inward reflection.

Not infrequently the children's literature of the eighteenth-century literalizes the metaphor lurking in this use of the term "reflection" by employing the mirror as an emblem for

reading-enabled self-consciousness or even explicitly defining the mental faculty of self-conscious reflection as a superior sort of looking-glass. The link between the proliferation of mirrors in Enlightenment Europe, the discoveries in optical science enabled by mirrors, and the growth of subject-centered epistemologies has been traced by a host of scholars.⁶⁶ To summarize the aspects of that scholarship most relevant here, the concepts of conscience, consciousness, and self-reflection developed side-by-side with optical science. Protestant doctrine required that one could know one's own moral state independent of mediation through a priest or interpreter of the holy word. They taught, therefore, that God had provided man with conscience, a metaphorical light illuminating the bearer's soul. The metaphor of light, as Gilbert Ryle notes, was drawn from the optically discovered world of Galilean science.⁶⁷ Thus when Locke wrote about the mental process of self-scrutiny, he, like many others, called it reflection, invoking the image of the mirror.

In J. H. Campe's *Elementary Dialogues for the Improvement of Youth* (1792), a book of lessons and stories premised as a Socratic dialogue between a tutor and his students, the tutor teaches that "The looking-glass only represents something, whereas the soul represents it to itself, or rather, the soul possesses an inward sentiment, the consciousness as well of itself as of the things it represents to itself."⁶⁸ Self-consciousness is that faculty that represents the self to itself—an invaluable ability, and one that sets humans apart from the rest of creation, according to Campe. Sarah Fielding's *The Governess: or, the Little Female Academy* (1749) also takes up the mirror as an emblem. The episodic novel begins with all the girls of the academy fighting over apples in a garden—a fracas meant to alert us to their lack of spiritual grace through the heavy-handed allusion to the Fall. Miss Jenny Peace, eldest student, afterwards persuades the pupils to reconcile, and then suggests that they spend their leisure time alternately telling

fictional tales (for example, the tale of two kidnapped lovers, a giant, and a heroic male dwarf called Mignon) and the stories of their own lives. The autobiographical mode of the majority of their shared stories makes the form of the novel one that emphasizes the importance of self-reflection. One of the girls enthusiastically thanks Jenny “for having put me into a Way of examining my Heart, and reflecting on my own Actions” (105).⁶⁹ Later, for the Romantics, the dawning of self-conscious reflection would be linked to the Fall as one of its unfortunate causes—both because Adam and Eve eat of the fruit and become self-conscious and thus exiled, and because the dawning of self-consciousness in the child comes to be seen as the beginning of the end of the paradise of childhood—but in this eighteenth-century children’s novel, self-consciousness acts as the corrective for the unfortunate squabbles in the garden.

If the form of the pupils’ brief memoirs embodies the act of self-conscious reflection, the content of the fanciful tales thematizes self-consciousness. One tale illustrates the distinction between the good self-consciousness of the girls’ autobiographical enterprise, and the bad self-consciousness that the tale refers to as “artfulness” (95). Two cousins, courted by the same man, are each approached by him in turn and asked to critique the other. The first cousin, Chloe, falsely reports that Caelia possesses two undesirable traits: “an Artfulness of Temper, and some few Sparks of Envy” (95). These are in fact the very faults that Chloe displays in lying about her cousin. Of course, the all-knowing suitor detects the lie and marries Caelia; Chloe feels so terrible about her deceit that she nearly dies (what else!) before reconciling with the newlyweds and living with them happily ever after. In another tale appears a magic mirror, which has the power to show anyone who gazes into it her “inward self”—a handy metaphor for the stories the girls tell of themselves, and, on a larger scale, a metaphor for the intended purpose of realistic eighteenth century children’s literature (125). Children’s literature sought to be a mirror in which

child readers studied themselves, and furthermore it aspired to teach children to internalize this mirror and practice self-conscious reflection on their own.

The experts in the fields of child-rearing and children's literature in the eighteenth century cautioned, however, that not all reading encourages the proper mode of reflection. More's *Strictures on Female Education* (1799) argues that the "indolent repose of light reading"⁷⁰ engaged in habitually and enthusiastically by the young (girls in particular) qualifies as nothing short of a form of dissipation that leaves "neither time for reflection, nor space for self-examination."⁷¹ Popular, non-religious literature, in More's estimation, weakens the reader's capacity to engage with better literature, the kind that cultivates the desired habits of self-examination. The problem is solved fairly easily; the young person, or the guardian thereof, must simply discern between good reading and bad, and discard the bad in favor of the good. Maria Edgeworth's concerns about children's literature and self-consciousness are less easily resolved. In *Practical Education* (1798), she worries that children will imitate what is too far from their own reality, particularly sentimental literature, and thus appear "ludicrous"⁷² in their affectation: "All the simplicity of youth is gone the moment children perceive, that they are extolled for the expression of fine feelings, and fine sentiments."⁷³

Once again affectation looms as a bugbear of late-eighteenth-century thought on youth, an insidious form of negatively valued self-consciousness difficult to identify and root out because the sentimental craze for simplicity means that what appears to be the most natural may in fact be the most affected. More marvels at "the quantity of *art* some people put in practice in order to appear *natural*; and the deep *design* which is set at work to exhibit *simplicity*."⁷⁴ Edgeworth cautions that we must not scold children for being proud of their accomplishments, for doing so can lead to false humility—another affectation⁷⁵: "The affectation of

humility...appears full as ridiculous, as troublesome, and as offensive as any of the graces of vanity, or the airs of pride. Young people...are not so easily cured of any species of affectation.”⁷⁶ Again the language of disease attaches to the problem of childhood affectation, a dangerous condition that seems to frustrate efforts to “cure” it because it poses as its own opposite:

And indeed this feigned simplicity is the most mischievous, because the most engaging of all the Proteus forms which dissimulation can put on. For the free and bold sentiments have been sometimes hazarded with fatal success under this unsuspected mask. And an innocent, quiet, indolent, artless manner has been adopted as the most refined and successful accompaniment of sentiments, ideas, and designs, neither innocent, quiet, nor artless.⁷⁷

The difficulty of discerning between true simplicity and affected, self-conscious simplicity leaves adults in a state of suspicious watchfulness of children that can even cause them to suspect the innocent of artful deception. In fact, in at least two of Edgeworth’s more popular tales, “Simple Susan” and “Lame Jarvas,” the drama derives from the *misperception* of affectation. Cynical adults and children, believing Susan and Jarvas to be a little too humble and simple, persecute them for an affectation they do not possess.

The only solution to this problem is for adults to assure the young that, though their affectation might deceive some, their insincerity will always be exposed to those of perfect perception. In *The Fairchild Family* (1818-47), for instance, Mary Sherwood repeatedly admonishes her child characters—and child readers—to remember that God sees the evil in their hearts, even when they have successfully concealed it from their parents and fellow children. Ellenor Fenn, in *The Fairy Spectator: or, The Invisible Monitor* (1789), sweetens the lesson by

replacing the stern and watchful God with a beautiful and charming fairy, but the child understands that her tutor's fanciful tale of a fairy with magic mirrors—one of which shows the child as she is, and one of which shows the child as she should be—encodes a deeper truth: “Miss Sprightly, retiring to her own chamber, wrote as follows in her memorandum book. May I always consider that God is every-where present; that He knows all which we do, say, or even think; and oh! may I always strive to please Him!” (11-12).

Miss Sprightly's convictions are only strengthened by the tale her governess, Miss Teachwell, tells her of the fairy, the mirrors, and the reformation of one Miss Child. Miss Child, losing her mother at the age of five, is given over to a governess who focuses on outward accomplishments. Well-dressed and well-groomed, Miss Child nonetheless grows “proud, selfish, peevish, and vain” (16). She likes only the pictures in books, but doesn't read and take to heart their good lessons. She “kept no account” of her spendings, which is of course meant to show us that she keeps no account of her self either (18). While admiring herself in a mirror one day, a fairy appears over her shoulder, reveals that she has been monitoring Miss Child's inner state all her life, and produces two “enchanted glasses: one shows you as you are, the other as you might and should be” (25-6). The fairy then tells Miss Child two tales of two girls whose names reflect their faults, Miss Pettish and Miss Lavish, both cured with the fairy's mirrors—and with some self-reflection: “You are to observe, that I insist that my pupils shall write an account of what passes, as they find it in the mirrors; this is to be done journal-wise, in two opposite pages of the same book” (28-9). What this means is that Miss Pettish—and then, at more length, Miss Lavish—writes first what she did, said, and thought in reality, then writes what she should have done, said, or thought instead. The “images” in the “mirrors” are just a metaphor for the process of written self-reflection and self-correction. All the children of the book—and there are

many, given the structure of a story within a story within a story—find the “mirror” of the journal to be an effective method of self-development. The child reader learns that, with the help of a pen and a blank book, she can be her own fairy spectator, her own self-reflecting mirror.

2.3 THE DIARY AS MIRROR

Children’s literature in the late eighteenth century, then, often recommended the keeping of a journal as a method of developing self-consciousness. Mrs. Fairchild, matriarch of *The Fairchild Family*, gives her daughter Lucy a journal in which to record “every day the naughty things which pass in your heart”:

You will then find, my dear, that many days, when you may appear to be very good in the eyes of your papa and mamma, and of other people, you are in reality in the sight of God very naughty. This custom, my dear child, will teach you to know your own heart, and will keep you from being proud, and thinking better of yourself than of other people.⁷⁸

The child reader observes as Lucy vows to be good, determined to write only good things in her journal, but inevitably fails. Yet Lucy still becomes more self-conscious and thus self-disciplined, and the child reader is advised to “get your friends to give you a blank book, and a pen and ink, that you also may keep an account of the sins of your heart, in order to keep you from being proud.”⁷⁹ The diary should make the child self-conscious in a way that is not self-aggrandizing—that would lead to affectation—but rather self-disciplining.

Diary-keeping was practiced by eighteenth-century adults as well as children. Protestant and Rationalist mindsets came together to recommend the practice of casting up accounts with

God, applying the scientific method of orderly observation to create a method of spiritual accounting that borrowed, as mentioned before, the sound business methodology of book-keeping. Clergyman Benjamin Bennet proposed that the pious use a diary to “settle Accounts every Day” so as to simplify matters at death, for if the “Records of Conscience” are “summ'd up and stated at the Bottom of every Page,” the process of Judgment will be expedited.⁸⁰ This account book of the soul is compared explicitly with the “Book of Accounts for an Ordinary Trade,” Bennet asking why Christians would hesitate to keep such records of their souls when they are so accustomed to do so for their trade.⁸¹ A host of others repeated the exhortation to “Make it part of your daily work to call your Heart to an Account.”⁸²

Once more it is worth noting that the practice of diary-writing also gained popularity due to the emergence of new forms of subjectivity as illuminated by Wahrman. The motives behind diary-keeping—the value placed on the expression of individuality and the imperative towards self-examination—resulted from a freshly sprung conception of the self as a relatively stable (but still shapeable, improvable) inner essence. Stable but capable of development, crucially; the point is to know your inner state so as to steadily alter it towards an ideal. Off the table, however, is the option that dominated earlier conceptions of selfhood, the choice simply to don a new mask and become a new person. The mask has been exchanged for the mirror, the act of reflection, often written, that reveals the self in order to perfect it. For children this act was imbued with a particular urgency, as adults, following Locke, understood childhood to be a time of rapid and perhaps irreversible development. It is not surprising, then, that children’s diaries were often monitored by parents eager to peruse the expressions of their child’s developing consciousness.

Self-consciousness and diary-keeping were mutually reinforcing tools that adults urged upon children to encourage the internalization of self-discipline. But until that internalization had been completely accomplished, parents would have often felt the need to maintain discipline through observation of the child. In Edgeworth's *Early Lessons* (1801), Rosamond's mother enjoins her "tell me what you think, and what you feel, so that I may help you to manage yourself so as to make you wise and good and happy; but, unless I know what passes in your little mind, I shall not be able to help you."⁸³ Reading the child's diary enabled the adult to investigate the written articulation of selfhood at a remove, perhaps in hopes that the child would reveal himself more readily when not face-to-face with authority. Though certainly a form of surveillance, this parental monitoring of the child's diary does not necessarily suggest compulsion. American child diarist Anna Green Winslow seems to have been eager to submit her diaries to her parents' review; occasionally within the pages of her diary she sulks mildly because they have failed to comment on what she has written in earlier entries. Of course, not all children would have enjoyed keeping and sharing a diary. Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker make it clear that the Dutch boy who is the subject of their study *Child of the Enlightenment* (2009) often resented his assigned diary-writing and his parents' review of it. And yet, as Baggerman and Dekker point out, though Otto starts out his diary-keeping years by constantly shirking his task of self-examination, he does eventually internalize his parents' discipline and become autonomously self-reflective.⁸⁴

Some child diarists do not seem to have needed any adult encouragement to engage in intense self-criticism. The preface to the posthumously published excerpts of Mary Gilbert's journal was written by founder of the Methodist movement John Wesley, who promises that her diary was a place where "she set down from time to time, merely for her own Use, just what

occurred between God and her own Soul,” on which account the record promises to be all the more valuable as spiritual inspiration: “But on this very Account, Persons of Understanding will set the greater Value upon it: because it contains only genuin Christian Experience, painted in its native Colours.”⁸⁵ According to Wesley, the very lack of “Art or Ornament” in her writing, and the fact that she wrote entirely for herself, guarantees the power of her diary as an exemplar of Christian self-examination—there is no mask here, only a mirror.⁸⁶ Gilbert, a pious Christian whose diary evidences the fact that she took to heart injunctions to continuously cast up accounts with God, was born in Antigua in 1751 but did not begin her journal until New Year’s Day 1765, at the age of thirteen. She wrote fervently and faithfully until her death at sixteen, a month before her seventeenth birthday. Her earliest entries display a habitual anxiety about her mind’s tendency to wander from pious thoughts, to be overtaken by a “light, trifling spirit” (17).⁸⁷ Commonly she records, in addition to brief mentions of visits and other daily activities, her success, or, more commonly, lack thereof, at keeping her mind “fixt entire” on God (12). Anything less than perfect mental attendance to religious thoughts tormented her, especially on Sundays, when she tended to write at more length, presumably because quiet reflection was one of the few activities that could be considered appropriate for the Sabbath. But she does not have to have her diary before her to examine the movements of her mind; she reports sleepless nights of “strict self-examination” while lying in bed (31). The diary shows the energy and desperation with which she monitored her own inner state, until towards the end of her life she exclaims “Lord, I am sick, sick of sin, and truly sick of self” (76). All this with no adult reading over her shoulder, indicating how successfully she had internalized the injunction to self-examination.

The diary as spiritual biography, in the style of Mary Gilbert, was encouraged not only by clergymen like Bennet and Wesley but also by Trimmer, the doyenne of children’s literature.

Trimmer reviews and extracts from a book titled *From MS. Papers found in the Writing-Desk of a Young Lady after her Decease*:

[Her] papers afford of recommending such an example of early piety to the imitation of young persons...we would advise their adopting the pattern she has set, by writing down her thoughts and reflections, as a great help to devotion, and a happy means of advancement in Christian knowledge and practical piety. We have known this method applied with good effect to the purposes of *self-examination*, as a regular part of the Sunday-evening employment, by keeping a weekly register of sins committed, blessings and mercies received, and new resolutions formed, accompanied by fervent prayers, written from the heart, for grace to keep them.⁸⁸

Trimmer assures her readers that keeping such a meticulous register of one's innermost self will not result in any negative forms of self-consciousness. Of another diarist, whose posthumously published journal she also recommends as a model, Trimmer says that one might think that "so much exactness in private, must have a little affected her behaviour in society, and yet nothing could be more free, simple, and natural...never was there a more deep, unfeigned, and artless lowliness of mind."⁸⁹ The self-consciousness bred by diary-keeping is in no way understood by Trimmer to compromise natural artlessness or lead to affectation. In fact, Trimmer seems to suggest that the diary is conducive to simplicity; good self-consciousness keeps bad self-consciousness at bay. But not all diarists' writing bears out Trimmer's promise. Child diarist Emily Shore of Suffolk, after nearly ten years of diary-keeping, confesses that despite her enthusiastic devotion to her intensely self-conscious journal, she has been guilty of affecting an undeserved (in her later estimation) reputation as a prodigy.

Shore began her diary at the age of eleven, inspired by the gift of a “small pocket-book,” and for the first five years she writes from her quiet and studious home in Suffolk, recording mostly observations on natural history, records of her impressive, self-directed course of studies, and intelligent critiques of her wide-ranging reading (138).⁹⁰ Early on most evidence of self-examination takes the form of scholarly self-criticism, as when she resolves to stop being such a “superficial botanist” and begin studying plant life more systematically (89). She turns to more spiritual reflections after her first bout of illness, using especially birthdays (she was born on Christmas Day) and New Year’s Days, as was common in diary-writing, to review her inner state.

On Christmas Day 1836, while staying with family in Devonshire, Shore outlines what she believes to be a basic element of her nature: dissatisfaction with herself. She confesses that she feels “I am not what I am supposed to be; I am liked and loved far more than I deserve” (175). She rebukes herself again two years later, at the end of her life, for having cultivated a reputation among her friends and family, particularly while in Devonshire, as “a wonder, a prodigy of talents, goodness, etc” (337). Because she has shared her diary with loved ones, it has served in part to help construct this reputation, and thus, she believes she has been “instinctively limiting the extent of my confidence in ink and paper” (262). In other words, the diary itself, though certainly self-conscious in the way recommended by Bennet and Trimmer, has been in part affected. Diary-keeping has encouraged self-consciousness of both sorts, good and bad. Shore resolves to start a separate, entirely unaffected diary, into which she “shall pour *all* the secret feelings of my heart; my sins, my weaknesses, my progress towards goodness, or, if unhappily necessary, an occasional relapse or decline” (263). No such second volume exists. Perhaps the possibility of posthumous publication—she more than once excoriates the practice of

publishing private diaries—stopped her from unlocking “the *secret chamber of the heart*” (262; emphasis original). If so, she was not mistaken, of course; unsurprisingly, when her sisters published her diaries in 1891, they expurgated the passages in which Shore denounces the publication of private journals.

The Quaker youth Frederic Post fits into the same tradition of self-conscious diary-keeping as Mary Gilbert and Emily Shore, and he also evinces some level of concern about the potential public-ness of his writing. Like Emily Shore, his diary begins with entries that are more outward-looking—he too writes about natural history, his reading, matters of the external world—before turning his gaze ever more inward to review his own thoughts, the quality of his inner being, often in a self-critical register worthy of Mary Gilbert: “Thoughts enter my mind that I detest, that I abhor, that I would wish in the wide space of aether, rather than in my breast, as a canker-worm to destroy every goodly leaf that would flourish therein, but I cannot eradicate them.”⁹¹ He too seems to be constrained in some ways by the possibility of an audience. Though he exclaims “Think not that *my* diary is intended for publication,” he apparently doth protest too much, for only a semi-colon separates that injunction from the caveat “but [published diarists] Evelyn or Burton, perhaps, thought the same,” followed by “a few remarks” offered to any future readers, should the diary “be discovered in the 20th century, and reprinted.”⁹² These remarks betray an anxiety that he will be misread: “I flatter myself, some advance of intellect may be discovered, but I am aware, I am still but a youth. The reader is unjust, if he accuse me of flattery or egotism in a history of myself.”⁹³ For Post, diary-keeping induces not only a self-conscious examination of interiority but also a self-conscious concern with the estimation of others. Here again we see that the seeds of Romantic discomfort with self-consciousness were already germinating even at a time dominated by a positive valuation of childhood self-scrutiny. The

child diarists show an uncomfortable awareness that their private self-reflection may potentially become public, or—even more disquieting—that the habit of self-examination might always already be tainted with a degree of affectation, a consciousness of performing a socially prestigious act.

Of course, not all child diaries evince self-consciousness, as not all diaries are accounts of the individual soul. Michele Cohen points out that many girls kept diaries that functioned primarily as a record of stimulating conversation, meant to educate them in the arts of social life.⁹⁴ In these cases, the diary was an aid in shaping the social self just as much as the still surviving conduct book was. As always, we must keep in mind the uneven developments in cultural formations as broad as the cultivation of selfhood in children. As John Brewer remarks, in addition to or instead of examining the inner self, the diary often “helped shape a polite person” by serving as a workbook in the social graces.⁹⁵ It is to this use that the diary is put in Mary Cockle’s children’s book *The Juvenile Journal, or, Tales of Truth* (1807). This fictional diary records not the thoughts and self-examinations of the little girl who is its subject; rather, the diary is kept by Caroline’s governess, Mrs. Villars, who each day writes to praise Caroline for the social graces she successfully observes and also to point out areas where she could improve, such as devoting herself more seriously to her studies. Only once does Caroline write in the journal herself, and then only to promise her governess that she has been dutifully attempting to follow the suggestions she is given. Her inner life seems of only secondary importance, with reflection encouraged primarily in service of perfecting her manners. Unlike the religious diarists who write to save their eternal souls, Mrs. Villars writes to save Caroline’s reputation as a respectable, well-mannered gentleman’s daughter. It is worth keeping in mind that before the

mirror became an emblem of reflecting on an interiorized self, it adorned dressing tables and drawing rooms, where it aided in the donning and perfecting of the socially acceptable visage.

The real-life diaries of Elizabeth and Eugenia Wynne also record sociality much more than they reveal internality. English Catholics who spent most of their youth avoiding the French Revolution while traveling about Europe, the sisters keep a lively record of aristocratic excess, a constant round of what Hannah More would surely term “dissipations,” which rarely afford the girls a moment for self-reflection. They spend a lot of time visiting big estates and having seemingly nightly impromptu parties, one of which ten-year-old Elizabeth (or Betsey, as she was called) breathlessly describes as “the loveliest and maddest of balls, mascarades (sic), changing of sex, tumbling of women and men on to the floor—in short, we stayed up, all of us, still dancing, until after midnight” (6). In their wealthy European milieu of the 1790s the stabilization of identity that Wahrman traces in England has not yet set in, and the popularity of the masquerade endures. Only occasionally do the girls trade their masks for the mirror of self-examination, and generally only long enough to flippantly record shrugging observations about their character: Betsey writes, “Read to-day some of my journals of last year and found them very stupid I am pretty certain that these will not be any wittier” (232). The diary can usually only engender the merest hint of self-consciousness in these irrepressible girls. Eugenia does write one paragraph-length reflective entry, in which she frustratedly laments her turbulent inner life, complaining that “I have two persons in me, one scolds me and disapproves of all I do, the other flatters my passions and counsels me to follow their dictates” (153). By the end of the entry, though, she seems reconciled to the fact that she is an “enigma” to herself—a state of uncertainty about identity tolerable and even, perhaps, preferable for a pair of masquerade-loving sisters who have not yet fallen under the spell of the new identity regime (153).

Fully immersed in that new regime of essential, stabile identity, nineteenth and twentieth century commentators on and editors of eighteenth and early-nineteenth century child diarists are frequently concerned to assure readers of the authenticity of these children's journals and tend to disavow that the children display any self-consciousness at all. Under the influence of the Romantic trend of despising self-consciousness in children, these later writers misread the diaries and obfuscate the self-consciousness that was so often the whole point of the endeavor. In an article on children's diaries, A. O. J. Cockshut declares that a "diarist, especially a child diarist, is the least traditional of writers; there is no parody, no cunning imitation, no 'anxiety of influence.'"⁹⁶ He particularly praises the Wynne sisters "for their lack of self-consciousness," and though he might be right about them, it is difficult to see how one could agree that a diarist like Emily Shore does not engage in any cunning imitation, given her precocious study of natural history, recorded using the best Enlightenment methods of scientific observation.

Counter to the assumptions of some modern readers of children's diaries, often child diarists did not "speak in secret to themselves," whether because, like Otto van Eck, they were compelled submit their writing to their parents' review, or because, like Anna Green Winslow, Emily Shore and Marjory Fleming (of whom I will have more to say shortly), they shared their diaries willingly.⁹⁷ Even those diarists who did not share their writing while alive probably did not write "unconstrained words," since, like Frederic Post, they would have been wary of the possibility of posthumous publication.⁹⁸ Anthony Fletcher's conviction of the absolute authenticity and utter lack of self-consciousness to be found in children's diaries ignores the likelihood of parents or older siblings reviewing a child's diary and neglects to take into account the inevitable constraints placed on a child's writing—just like anyone else's—by attempts to conform to conventions of writing and to desired models of self-presentation. It is hard to take

his word for it that child diarists “opened their hearts, in the privacy of bedrooms, writing journals which they regarded as holding a confessional status.”⁹⁹ To write in a diary seems to have nearly always been, in one way or another, a self-conscious exercise not of opening one’s heart, but rather of examining it, turning the mirror of consciousness on one’s own thoughts, becoming the object of one’s own observations.

The case of Marjory Fleming is instructive in understanding the ways in which post-Romantic readers of child diaries have written over the self-conscious reflection that had been the purpose of the diary with a new narrative of natural, unconscious, spontaneous expression. Born in 1803 to a middle-class Scottish family, Marjory died just short of her ninth birthday, leaving behind four journals written in the two years before her death.¹⁰⁰ H. B. Farnie published extracts the journals in 1858, framing them as the delightful works of “Pet Marjorie,”¹⁰¹ an extraordinary child. John Brown, reviewing Farnie’s volume, embellished the myth of Pet Marjorie, inventing a friendship with Sir Walter Scott, and making her a household name in Victorian England and beyond. Her admirers included Robert Louis Stevenson and Mark Twain.

Fleming’s beloved cousin and tutor Isa assigned her the task of writing in a journal chiefly as an exercise in improving her hand-writing. But hand-writing could be practiced in a number of other forms—copying out passages from other texts, writing letters, etc.—and the fact that Isa assigned a diary suggests that she, like so many instructors of children at the turn of the century, thought it would be good for Marjory to engage in self-reflective writing. In fact Fleming’s journals do evince the kind of sober reflection seen in other child diarists of the period. In her first journal, her original poems her poems follow the pattern of Barbauld’s hymns, with descriptions of nature—“leaves that once was green and beautifull now withered and all wed away scatering their remains on the footpath and highroads”—leading to religious

reflection—"But when we think that if we died No pleasure there would be denied There happiness doth always reign And there we feel not a bit pain" (*sic*).¹⁰² The second journal is much more focused on Fleming's self-accounting of her faults—she, like other child diarists, is internalizing self-conscious discipline. She reflects on the nature and outcomes of transgression, opining that "wickedness and vice makes one miserable & unhappy as well as a concousness of guilt on our mind," and "Vanity is a great folly & sometimes leads to a great sin disimulation I think is worse" (*sic*).¹⁰³ These passages reveal a child ruminating on morality, religion, and the necessity of accounting for one's inner state.

Yet her admirers celebrate Fleming's diaries as "artless writings," calling her a "merry inconsequent babbler, as every real child should be."¹⁰⁴ Her diaries were understood to evince "no trace of the morbid tendencies too often associated with child prodigies."¹⁰⁵ Judith Plotz has noted that Fleming's nineteenth-century admirers saw her as not so much a child prodigy—those often hated or pitied figures of precocious learning or achievement—as a prodigy at being a child.¹⁰⁶ The excerpts most prized from her diaries were not the serious reflections or Barbauld-esque verses, but rather her more silly entries, like a famous poem on turkeys. The self-rebuke, the meditations on sin, were either ignored or waved away as so much obligatory, hollow moralizing, there only to appease her cousin. When Twain raves about the journals' "delightful jumble of first-hand cloth of gold and second-hand rags," of course it is all the somber reflection that Twain discards as rags, assuming they cannot be thoughts original to his "little scamp," his "little rascal," his "Wonder Child":¹⁰⁷

She was made out of thunder-storms and sunshine, and not even her little perfunctory pieties and shop-made holinesses could squelch her spirits or put out her fires for long. Under pressure of a pestering sense of duty she heaves a

shovelful of trade godliness into her journals every little while, but it does not offend, for none of it is her own; it is all borrowed, it is a convention, a custom of her environment.¹⁰⁸

For Fleming's nineteenth-century readers—her idolaters, even—the self-conscious reflections on nature, religion, and self-improvement must be discarded as unnatural to the image of unconscious childhood they yearn to exalt.

And the reinvention of Fleming as paragon of unconscious childhood is not contained within the bounds of the nineteenth century; the introduction to a 1921 reprinting of the journals declares that her writing charms because she is “wholly unconscious” of its attractiveness.¹⁰⁹ Even many contemporary scholars of children's literature have inherited the nineteenth-century vision of Fleming as unselfconscious child. Gillian Avery, following Twain, seems sure that the pious things written by Marjory Fleming are “dutiful clichés” through which “the real Marjory keeps breaking through.”¹¹⁰ Judith Plotz too seems to endorse many of the views of Fleming as merely parroting “dutiful moral maxims,” but more truly exemplifying “unselfconscious curiosity” about the outside world.¹¹¹ Our modern desire to find free expression where there is in fact meticulous self-study is an artifact of the Romantic devaluation of self-consciousness in the child, the same devaluation that led post-Romantic critics of children's literature to excoriate writers like Edgeworth, More, and Trimmer for inducing self-consciousness. This devaluation is the subject of the next chapter.

3.0 NO “SMACK OF HAMLET”: THE REJECTION OF SELF-CONSCIOUS CHILDHOOD

Nothing should be more impressed on parents and tutors than to
make children forget themselves.

---Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “New System of Education,”
a lecture delivered in Bristol on 18 Nov 1813¹¹²

During the first three decades of the nineteenth century, a new way of conceptualizing the relationship between childhood and self-consciousness supplanted the previous consensus in Britain that self-conscious reflection was good for children, in that it aided them in achieving salvation, or rationality, or both. Instead, British writers—many of them routinely grouped by scholars under the rubric of Romanticism¹¹³—increasingly represented childhood as an era that should remain free of self-consciousness. Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, who together exerted an immense influence over nineteenth-century thinking about childhood, are united in prohibiting self-conscious contemplation through literature for children. On the contrary, Coleridge opines, children should be restricted to reading literature that positively discourages self-conscious thought. In an 1813 lecture on education, immediately following the sentence that forms this chapter’s epigraph, Coleridge elaborates on the proper choice of literature for children:

[B]ooks which only told how Master Billy and Miss Ann spoke and acted, were not only ridiculous but extremely hurtful; much better give them ‘Jack the Giant-killer’ or the seven Champions, or anything which, being beyond their own sphere of action, should not feed this self-pride.¹¹⁴

For Coleridge, books that teach correct social conduct through the presentation of contemporary child characters like “Master Billy” invite the child reader reflect on her own social self, and thus make her self-absorbed, full of “self-pride”—self-conscious. However, fantastic literature, like the fairy tales of Jack the Giant-killer, has the desirable effect of making children “forget themselves” and thus remain blissfully unselfconscious. Master Billy and Miss Ann are the pattern children of the late-eighteenth-century’s largely female-authored works of children’s literature, works which Charles Lamb dismisses as “nonsense” sure to cause “conceit”¹¹⁵ in child readers, and which Wordsworth calls “trumpery”¹¹⁶ and exiles from the nursery in favor of, once again, fairy tales.

The shift at this time towards drawing a bright line between childhood and self-consciousness requires explanation, given the paradoxical fact that so many Romantic writers, both in Britain and on the continent, were, at the same time, busily arguing that self-consciousness *defined* humanity. They posited that the self-consciousness of the human accounted for his superiority to all lesser creatures and made him capable of union with the divine. For these writers, though self-consciousness might be a painful, fallen state of alienation from oneself and from nature, the fall was a fortunate one. Writers from Friedrich Schiller to Samuel Taylor Coleridge theorized a dialectical process whereby humans, collectively and individually, move from naïve, unselfconscious union with nature, through a fallen and alienated

but necessary state of self-consciousness, to, finally an ideal synthesis of nature and consciousness that reunifies the self and reunites humanity with the divine.

This chapter considers why, given the Romantic theory of the necessity of self-consciousness for full subjectivity and eventual transcendence to divinity, many Romantics insisted upon the unselfconsciousness of children to the point of actively attempting to prevent children from entering into self-consciousness. The easiest answer—and certainly not an untrue one—is that the child became a treasured symbol of a previous, unfallen state that self-conscious adults could admire while at the same time feeling superior to it. Yet, the child also becomes a tool for thinking through the problems presented by the Romantics' new theories of subjectivity: the paradox of an age that valued autonomy and authenticity but found their defining characteristic—self-consciousness—to be at war with those qualities; and, the great mystery of self-consciousness, that one becomes simultaneously subject and object to oneself, and the horror attendant on self-objectification. I will argue that the Romantics sought to hold off the dawning of self-consciousness in children not out of any particularly tender feelings toward children, but rather for the good of society, having decided that the optimum conditions for the ideal subject within human society required a kind of incubation period for the self that corresponded, for them, with childhood. As the chapter closes, I will discuss the ways in which children's literature—in a reversal of late-eighteenth-century thought on the subject—was re-theorized as a medium that, at its most pernicious, encouraged self-consciousness, and, at its best, stalled it. The Romantic attempt to purge children's literature of anything that could promote the growth of self-consciousness in the child gives us, among other oddities, one of the strangest Romantic Hamlets imaginable.

3.1 CHARLES LAMB'S HAMLET

Laurence Olivier prefaced his film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with the line, "This is the story of a man who could not make up his mind."¹¹⁷ Olivier has been roundly abused for this "fatally reductive dogma,"¹¹⁸ but truly he has merely offered up a classically Romantic reading of the character of Hamlet—distilled perhaps to inanity, but faithful nonetheless to the pronouncements of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Friedrich Schlegel, and their many contemporaries of the same mind. To be fair, literary critic Harold Bloom exposes himself as equally guilty of slavishly parroting the Romantics, and in an equally reductive manner, when he declares that the "enormous subject of [*Hamlet*] is the meaning of self-consciousness."¹¹⁹

Olivier and Bloom can so readily summarize Shakespeare's complex and tangled play by reference to the mental state of its hero—paralyzed into indecision and inactivity by an excess of self-consciousness—because they are authorized to do so by the Romantic interpretive consensus on the play, a reading that held sway over critics at least until T. S. Eliot's extremely vocal dissent at the beginning of the twentieth century, and which continued to exert an influence on productions of the play even after Eliot.¹²⁰ It is as a descendant of the Romantics that Bloom can offhandedly remark that Hamlet's self-consciousness—by 2008 such a commonplace that Bloom barely offers any explanation of how the term fits the character—makes him "the Western hero of consciousness."¹²¹ Romantic criticism made Hamlet synonymous with self-consciousness, as well as making both the character and his disposition synonymous with modernity. And yet when Romantic essayist Charles Lamb produced a version of *Hamlet* for children in *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), his Danish prince lacked the very characteristic that he had come to stand for. A brief meditation on these two Hamlets—the self-conscious Romantic hero and *Tales From*

Shakespeare's unselfconscious prince—will serve to illustrate how complex the issue of self-consciousness and childhood became in this period.

Jonathan Bate proclaims in the introduction to his collection *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, the “Romantics’ reinvention of Hamlet as a paralysed Romantic was their single most influential critical act.”¹²² His assertion highlights the three features of the Romantic Hamlet that I want to elaborate on momentarily.¹²³ First, a group of Romantic writers collectively reinvented Hamlet; second, their Hamlet is paralyzed; third, their Hamlet is a Romantic. The extent to which the celebration of Hamlet was unusual before the early nineteenth century might be represented by means of a single quotation from Voltaire, who observed that *Hamlet* “seems the work of a drunken savage.”¹²⁴ French neo-classicism, which dominated eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, not only discounted *Hamlet* but also devalued Shakespeare himself. Romantic writers, flying in the face of aesthetic rules, discovered in Shakespeare one model of poetic genius and, in his creation Hamlet an opposite but still potent model of the same. They made Shakespeare the protean, sympathetic, natural genius; simultaneously, they made Hamlet stand for the self-conscious, introspective, detached genius.

Hamlet’s paralysis by way of crippling—but admirably deep and philosophical—self-consciousness probably originated with the German Romantic critic A. W. Schlegel. Schlegel, in the course of his lectures on dramatic art in the nineteenth century’s first decade, posits that *Hamlet* “is intended to show that a calculating consideration, which exhausts all the relations and possible consequences of a deed, must cripple the power of acting.”¹²⁵ Unlike the English Romantics, Schlegel does not seem to find this Hamlet’s “calculating consideration” to be the sign of a noble mind; on the contrary, with a note of disgust he remarks that Hamlet “has a natural inclination for crooked ways,” and that his “far-fetched scruples” amount to “mere

pretexts,” a convoluted form of “artifice and dissimulation” calculated to “cover his want of determination.”¹²⁶ The English Romantics echoed Schlegel’s analysis of Hamlet as a practitioner of “never-satisfied meditation,”¹²⁷ but dropped the German’s accusations of affectation. Coleridge writes of a Hamlet who is “the victim of circumstances,”¹²⁸ and who cannot be blamed for the resultant unbalancing of his mind, which traps him in the “world within him.”¹²⁹ William Hazlitt names him the “prince of philosophical speculators,”¹³⁰ and when, by the end of the Romantic period, Byron complains that he has had enough of Hamlet—“Weak, irresolute, a talking sophist. Yet—O I am sick of this most lame and impotent hero!”¹³¹—Shelley admits that the play demonstrates the “errors to which a contemplative and ideal mind is liable,” but still vaunts the prince as a “profound philosopher.”¹³²

Probably the clearest indicator of the Romantics’ regard for their constitutionally brooding Hamlet¹³³ is their habit of identifying with him. Hazlitt proclaims, “It is *we* who are Hamlet,”¹³⁴ that “we” expanding to enfold all who live under modernity. Coleridge trades on Hamlet’s rising popularity as a figure of tortured, self-conscious genius in declaring, “I have a smack of Hamlet myself, if I may say so.”¹³⁵ Critic Martin Greenberg argues that both Coleridge and Wordsworth felt called to something they thought of as—though he coined the term—their Hamlet vocation:

I mean their being ‘called,’ each in his own way, to a life of inwardness, introspection, mind—with all its danger. What dangers? The dangers of the reflective mind split apart from the effective will; spirituality parted from vitality, from human life and action; in Wordsworth’s own language: knowledge and self-knowledge purchased by the loss of power. But this is an actual condition rather

than a danger only threatening—the condition of the man of modern civilization...¹³⁶

The Romantics give us the self-conscious Hamlet, who is for them the supreme emblem of a problem they discover at the heart of modernity: the problem of the self, and the dizzying impossibilities of knowing its mysteries.

I dwell on the Romantic re-imagining of Hamlet in part because it encapsulates many of the ways in which self-consciousness was central to the Romantic self-image and to their philosophical enquiry, and in part to ask this question: given the Romantic consensus on Hamlet-as-self-conscious-hero, how can we account for the superlatively unselfconscious version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that Lamb wrote for *Tales from Shakespeare*? Lamb, who co-wrote the volume with his sister Mary Lamb, was no dissenter from the Romantic consensus on Hamlet. He too understood Hamlet to be a character defined by contemplation; he wrote that nine-tenths of the character consists in "solitary musings."¹³⁷ Yet his prose version of the play for children disposes of all of those musings. His chosen device of an omniscient third-person narrator allows the text to dispense with dialogue, with two brief exceptions: the heated argument between Gertrude and Hamlet, and Gertrude's lament for Ophelia after her death—and those, even, are altered from Shakespeare's original wording. The reader finds no trace of Hamlet's famous "To be, or not to be" soliloquy, none of his conviction that "conscience does make cowards of us all,"¹³⁸ and none of the self-analysis of the wavering position that made him, for the Romantics, the essence of self-conscious inactivity. *Tales from Shakespeare* thus passes over the very soliloquy that Marjorie Garber points out "has become the hallmark of interiority and consciousness, the speech that -- quoted, parodied, parsed, and pondered -- has come to define modernity and modern self-consciousness, the birth, in effect, of the modern subject, of modern

subjectivity itself.”¹³⁹ In addition, Lamb almost entirely elides Hamlet’s agony in 2.2, when he sees the player’s passion in performance and excoriates himself for not feeling such overwhelming motivation to action as he has surely been provided by the ghost of his father: “I / A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak / Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause / and can say nothing.”¹⁴⁰ In its place, Lamb offers this comparatively mild sentence: “His very melancholy, and the dejection of spirits he had so long been in, produced an irresoluteness and wavering of purpose, which kept him from proceeding to extremities.” Lamb’s *Hamlet* for children shows no trace of the prince as originator of modern self-consciousness that the Romantics so recently and so enthusiastically had discovered in the play.

So here is a *Hamlet* in which readers find none of Hamlet’s famous soliloquies, and the thoughts of his to which they *are* privy, as a result of the omniscient narration, *could* be read as unselfconscious. In other words, a reader might easily assume that the narrator—not Hamlet—peers into Hamlet’s mind and soul and tells us what Hamlet feels deep down, what thoughts lie in his unconscious, and thus a reader might come away from the Lamb re-write believing that Hamlet himself never indulges in introspection. Why offer children this version of *Hamlet* that abstracts everything about the prince that made him so dear to the Romantics? Why create this unselfconscious Hamlet for child readers? I propose that Lamb altered his *Hamlet* radically for the very purpose of saving child readers from exposure to the self-consciousness of the philosopher prince.¹⁴¹ No child, Lamb’s alterations imply, should have, like Coleridge, a “smack of Hamlet.” Already afloat in Romantic criticism was the notion that the play not only depicted self-consciousness but also induced it in spectators and readers of the play. To watch or read *Hamlet* was to become oneself a little more like Hamlet. Schlegel contended that the play was “calculated to call forth” meditation on “human destiny” and “the dark perplexity of events of

this world” in the “minds of spectators,”¹⁴² and Coleridge thought consideration of the play required that “we should reflect on the constitution of our own minds.”¹⁴³ Byron intends mockery when he declares that after a solitary reading of the play he feels “perplexed, confused, and inextricably self-involved,”¹⁴⁴ but the dangers he proposes one invites by reading *Hamlet* are likely the very dangers Lamb hoped to prevent through his radical re-write of the play for children. The self-consciousness of modern humanity might elicit a lament from Romantic adults who look back longingly on lost unity of self, but it is also, as Friedrich Schiller makes clear¹⁴⁵, a necessary step toward attaining an even higher ideal than unselfconsciousness. Yet Lamb’s *Hamlet* for children demonstrates the extent to which, beginning in the Romantic period, many adults shrank from associating self-consciousness with childhood.¹⁴⁶ Lamb’s *Hamlet* may very well stand as the Romantic inauguration of a practice of creating children’s literature intended to thwart the flowering of self-consciousness in the child reader. But why did the Romantics seek to prevent children from entering self-consciousness, and why use children’s literature as a tool in this crusade? The rest of this chapter will seek answers to those questions.

3.2 THE ROMANTIC PHILOSOPHY OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

In contrast to the child theorists of the late eighteenth century, who distinguished between positive forms of self-consciousness in children (reflection) and negative forms (affectation), the English Romantics in the early nineteenth century began a tradition of posing *any* self-consciousness in children as a dire affliction. By tracing the influence of Rousseau and his German followers on English Romantic thought, we can see that the problem of self-consciousness is, at its heart, a problem of modernity and its effects on subjectivity. As Stephen

Bygrave points out, the “status of the self” “has long been recognised as a central feature in Romanticism. However, this truism conceals the extent to which the self was a problem for Romantic writers: it is a problem having moral, metaphysical and political implications.”¹⁴⁷ In the narrative of modernity collectively created by thinkers from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Friedrich Schiller to Georg Hegel, modern man, upon entering society, became self-conscious; that is, he began to see himself as the object of the gaze of others and became an object to himself as he attempted to mold himself to the expectations of that external gaze. For Rousseau, this self-objectification constitutes a regrettable loss of autonomy and authenticity. As Alessandro Ferrara makes clear, Rousseau proposes not a reversal—he does not, despite what his critics may say, advocate a return to a state of nature—but a corrective in the form of education:

How can the self be made more impervious to the effects of a competitive society without isolating it from all social relations? How can moral autonomy and personal authenticity be attained? The answer to these questions is sought by Rousseau in the direction of education and 'personal reform' toward an authentic conduct of life.¹⁴⁸

In part through the nineteenth-century focus on the education of children as the key to curing the ills of modern subjectivity, the problem of self-consciousness was increasingly attached to the child. The English Romantics agreed that the problem with society was that it required authentic individuals, and agreed that those individuals were to be made (or protected) in earliest childhood, through a properly administered education.¹⁴⁹ But education was not the only factor tying the problem of self-consciousness to childhood in the Romantic period. In the early nineteenth century the working out of anxieties about subjectivity often centered on the child,¹⁵⁰ one figure useful for the culture as a heuristic for thinking through a vertiginous puzzle.

Many Romantic writers, particularly lyric poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge, were both fascinated with and tortured by what Deborah Forbes calls the "persistent philosophical paradox of self-consciousness," that it can at once be the defining feature of the human experience and also threaten to leave humans hopelessly alienated from a direct experience of the world and themselves—a threat that escalates the more the paradox is pondered.¹⁵¹ So integral to the philosophy of the early nineteenth century is this ontological problem that Forbes goes so far as to propose that Romanticism may be "defined as the recognition and elaboration of self-consciousness."¹⁵² Forbes emphasizes the vertiginous nature of this Romantic project of contemplating the self: "self-consciousness implies an infinite regress, in which the self that is conscious must be supplemented by the self that is conscious that it is conscious, and then the self that is conscious that it is conscious that it is conscious, and so forth."¹⁵³

Here it will help to consider the seismic shifts in theorizations of selfhood that led up to the Romantic period and its obsession with self-consciousness, returning also to the familiar emblems of mask and mirror that formed a thread through the last chapter. Perhaps the most pertinent forces founding the cultural centrality of individual selfhood were Enlightenment political philosophy and Protestant religious doctrine.¹⁵⁴ Enlightenment political theory established the importance of the individual by elaborating the concept of natural rights, and Protestant theology insisted on the individual's unmediated relationship with divinity. Together the Enlightenment and the Reformation gave people a sense of themselves as individuals—but did not immediately create a sense of stable selfhood. In the early-to-mid-eighteenth-century the individual likely had no sense of a deep and constant core of self, but rather changed selves like changing masks. The trick for this era was to wear the mask perfectly, with no slipping. But the invention of the stable self, defined in terms of self-consciousness by Locke and others, led to an

increasing anxiety about the status of the self. Thus we first find a serious attention to the child self, in the late eighteenth century, when masks are eschewed in favor of mirrors: rather than perfect her performance of a role (wear the mask with no slipping), the child must strive to be self-conscious, to perceive and perfect her inner self (peer into the mirror and regulate what is found).

As the self becomes more and more precious during the early Romantic period, anxiety grows that it could be lost or damaged irrevocably, and new theories of self-consciousness begin to posit that to know oneself is to be divided from oneself. Romantic writers begin to evince a desperation to move through this damaged, self-conscious, fallen state to a new, improved ideal consciousness. In the case of children, however, a different rule applies; they are to be kept back in unselfconsciousness. If the experts on childhood of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century understood a certain kind of self-consciousness as necessary to engender rational adulthood and promote Christian virtue in children, many Romantic writers feared the objectification of and estrangement from the self that they perceived as proceeding from the child's entrance into socially-aware self-consciousness. In this formulation, the mirror of self-consciousness works as a catalyst for the construction of the mask, the inauthentic selfhood that alienates one from one's own inner truth. The new ideal of childhood is one of utter unselfconsciousness, a childhood without masks *or* mirrors.

The tenor of this new Romantic sensibility regarding self-consciousness and childhood can be readily illustrated by way of an 1810 essay on marionette theater by Heinrich von Kleist, a German Romantic. Kleist demonstrates his allegiance to the Romantic equation of the entrance into self-consciousness with fallen-ness in a letter to a young protégé: “[e]very initial gesture, everything that is done spontaneously is beautiful; but once conscious of itself, it

becomes twisted and distorted.”¹⁵⁵ The marionette essay uses the device of a narrator’s conversation with an imaginary leading dancer, Herr C.; their subject is the advantages a marionette has over a living dancer: “First a negative gain...: that such a figure [the marionette] would never be affected.”¹⁵⁶ The distaste for perceptible affectation echoes Locke, who defines affectation as “an awkward and forced imitation of what should be genuine and easy, wanting the beauty that accompanies what is natural.”¹⁵⁷ However, Locke thought the affectation would disappear once the performance was perfected, while Kleist believes the human dancer will never be as perfect as the marionette. The mistakes dancers make due to affectation, Herr C. continues, “are inevitable because we have eaten of the tree of knowledge,”¹⁵⁸ and that state of fallen-ness cannot be reversed. (We can see in Kleist the insistent Romantic association of the fall into self-consciousness with Adam and Eve’s fall from Paradise.) The fallen human dancer can never perfect his performance enough to rival that of the marionette dancer. In fact, as the second half of the essay will argue, practice, rather than making perfect, makes matters worse. For Kleist, the object—the marionette—is more admirable and natural than the human can hope to be.

His position here is instructive, as it parallels the Romantic position regarding children and self-consciousness. The pre-self-conscious child is effectively objectified because the Romantic philosophy, as we shall see, defines full subjectivity as self-conscious; but at the same time, the child is considered an object worth regarding with a certain kind of admiration. Of course Kleist would never prefer to be a puppet rather than a person, and most adults do not truly wish to be the unself-conscious child again. But that does not stop them from lamenting the child’s loss of “natural charm” as it enters self-consciousness, even if the “fall” also means an entrance into full subjectivity. Kleist’s narrator agrees heartily with Herr C. about the pitfalls

of self-consciousness, and tells the tale of a sixteen-year-old boy, a “young friend” on the cusp of adulthood who “lost his innocence, and Paradise too” by happening to glance into a mirror and notice how he resembled a popular statue. When he tried to recreate the effect for the narrator, he had lost his “natural charm.” Afterward, “an inexplicable change took place,” and the young man “began to stand in front of the mirror all day long, and one virtue after another dropped away from him.”¹⁵⁹ The entrance into self-consciousness, coincident here with the exit from childhood, comes off with the aid of a mirror, and leaves the young man bereft of grace.

What I am hoping to convey here is the complexity of the Romantic theorization of self-consciousness both in general and in relation to childhood. I contend that their anxiety about self-consciousness and childhood has less to do with children than it has to do with their worries about adult subjectivity—and its implications for society. First, there is the aforementioned fear of self-objectification. To be conscious of oneself as a self is to be at once subject and object of one’s own perceptions. Perhaps the most worrisome implication of this outcome is that objectification is kindred to death. Second, to be socially self-conscious is to become aware of oneself as the object of another’s perception, meaning a loss of autonomy; your subjectivity depends on another’s. Formerly affectation, a bad form of self-consciousness, was a concern because of the demand for sincerity—the outward-directed responsibility to show your true self to others. It remains a bad form of self-consciousness, but for different reasons: to be affected is to be inauthentic, to betray an inward-directed responsibility to one’s true inner self. This chapter, though, is most invested in exploring my third answer to the puzzle of why so many influential thinkers of the early nineteenth century embraced self-consciousness in certain ways for adults but inaugurated a deep distaste for any association of self-consciousness with childhood. Though Romantic writers have often been understood to spurn social harmony in

their preference for the internal harmony of the sacred individual, my third answer sees early nineteenth-century writers on self-consciousness and childhood as acting not out of anti-social impulses, but in fact quite the opposite. I argue that they wanted to protect the child from self-consciousness out of concern not so much for the child as for the future adult, and thus the future of society. To explain that contention I will trace the leading theories of self-consciousness and childhood from Rousseau and Schiller to the Romantic poets.

3.3 ROUSSEAU, SCHILLER, AND THE CHILD

Scholars of the history of childhood often focus on Rousseau as giving us the child as precious seed protected in the fenced garden of the home, guarded from the evils of culture. What too frequently gets left out of this account of his work is the complexity of the reasoning behind that protection. Rousseau has no interest in guarding the child for its own sake. His history of abandoning his own children in infancy should be enough to demonstrate Rousseau's lack of concern for actual children. Rousseau believes in protecting the child only so as to produce a superior adult and thus a superior culture. Guarding the child—from culture, and from self-consciousness—is Rousseau's solution to a problem that has little to do with childhood and everything to do with adult society.

Hazlitt wrote of Rousseau that he “had the most intense consciousness of his own existence.”¹⁶⁰ In his *Confessions* Rousseau certainly represents himself as self-conscious from early childhood. He dates the dawn of “an uninterrupted consciousness of myself” (325) at the tender age of six:¹⁶¹

My childhood was not that of a child. I always thought and felt like an adult. It was only in growing up that I rejoined the class of ordinary men, which I had left upon being born. The reader will laugh at my modesty in presenting myself as a prodigy. So be it. But when he has finished laughing, I will ask him to find me a child of six who is so drawn to novels, transported to the point of hot tears; find me such a child and I will admit that vanity is ridiculous and that I am wrong.

(390)

The quote reveals a number of themes that will resound throughout nineteenth-century thought on childhood. First, for many, not every child can rightly be considered a child. Often, only the unselfconscious child earns recognition as a true child. Rousseau characterizes himself at age six as something other than a child, a prodigy who thinks and feels like an adult. Second, being a prodigy may make Rousseau extraordinary—which cannot but kindle his prodigious pride—but the Romantic consensus on prodigies will be damning, a point Wordsworth makes most famously in his *Prelude*, where he writes of a child prodigy as a “monster birth.”¹⁶² Third, Rousseau instructs us to see his premature self-consciousness emerging specifically as a result of his reading. From novels he gains a “great facility in reading and in understanding myself” (326). Many child theorists of the late eighteenth century would have welcomed this development, as it involves their two most urgent prescriptions for children: early literacy and early self-reflection. Yet Rousseau calls it a “dangerous method,” for the reading leads him into self-contemplation and an indulgence of the passions, both of which he considers premature for a child of six (326).

In *Émile*, then, Rousseau provides an imagined corrective to the problems of his own childhood. Famously, of course, one of his first steps as the tutor of the hypothetical Émile is to banish all books—save *Robinson Crusoe*—from the nursery. Together with shielding the boy

from commerce with society, the erasure of literature from his life will prevent Émile from premature self-consciousness. Unlike other tutors, Rousseau refuses to encourage “development of the germs of artificiality” in his young charge; these, he says are the enemy of “self-knowledge and self-control, the arts of life and happiness” (16).¹⁶³ It is not the case, then, that Rousseau and his many followers desire the child to be completely without a sense of self; self-knowledge nurtured in solitude, however, is vastly preferred to self-consciousness born of social intercourse, and mostly consists, for Rousseau, of accurately assessing and responding to one’s needs—as opposed to imagining needs which are in fact implanted in one by social contact, such as the need for fame or luxury.

By fifteen, though, Émile must learn to enter society, and here is where Rousseau begins to distinguish between “self-love” and “selfishness,” which seem to correlate respectively with the distinction between “self-knowledge” and “self-consciousness.” Self-love “concerns itself only with ourselves” and consists entirely in answering to the needs of one’s own physical and mental health (174). Selfishness, “which is always comparing itself with others, is never satisfied and never can be; for this feeling, which prefers ourselves to others, requires that they should prefer us to themselves, which is impossible” (174). What makes a man “really bad is a multiplicity of needs and dependence on the opinions of others” (175). Note that self-consciousness carries a negative value due to its tendency to wrap the youth up in dependency. Those qualities Rousseau condemns the most heartily—“vanity,” “emulation,” “boasting”—are “those sentiments which force us to compare ourselves with others” (187). Self-consciousness makes the child envious of those who seem better in comparison to himself, dependent upon the regard of others, and deceitful in his attempts to live up to standards received from society.

Writing in 1762, Rousseau prefigures and perhaps helps initiate the late-eighteenth-century disdain for masks: “The man of the world almost always wears a mask. He is scarcely ever himself and is almost a stranger to himself; he is ill at ease when forced into his own company. Not what he is, but what he seems, is all he cares for” (191). While Rousseau is willing to concede that some level of dependency is the inevitable result of social life, he maintains that Émile can avoid wearing the mask while still learning to recognize the masks others wear—and to disdain them. At eighteen Émile will learn about masks by beginning his first course of reading, specifically in classical history:

[I]magine my Émile, who has been carefully guarded [from reading, and social life in general]...when the curtain goes up casting his eyes for the first time upon the world's stage; or rather picture him behind the scenes watching the actors don their costumes, and counting the cords and pulleys which deceive with their feigned shows the eyes of the spectators. His first surprise will soon give place to feelings of shame and scorn of his fellow-man; he will be indignant at the sight of the whole human race deceiving itself and stooping to this childish folly. (203-4)

Reading, theater, spectacle, shame, self-consciousness: all are correlated here, and against all stands Émile, the child who sees through it all, who knows but remains innocent. His “heart is as pure as his body”; he “has all the indiscretion of innocence” and “is absolutely out-spoken” (283). An anti-theatrical child, Émile’s authenticity makes him transparent to the eyes of his tutor: “I often know what he is feeling before he is aware of it himself” (284). Émile needn’t know these things about himself—it is enough that the tutor can discern his pupil’s simplicity—because Émile only needs the instinctive distaste for theatrical, self-conscious display to protect him from its degradations: “Émile, in the sleep of ignorance, escapes the perils which he does not

see” (284). When Émile finally does enter society, he shows himself to be “neither shy nor conceited, but natural and sincere,” for “he is just the same among a group of people as he is when he is alone” (301). To be shy is to self-consciously worry about one's failures in the eyes of others, and to be conceited is to self-consciously preen about one's successes in winning the regard of others, but Emile shuns both forms of self-consciousness by having no concern for their regard whatsoever: “he scarcely troubles himself at all about what people think about him, and he is not the least afraid of ridicule” (302). Rousseau’s ideal is a society composed entirely of Émiles, autonomous and authentic citizens who do right because it is right, unselfishly and without regard to others—in the best way possible.

Writing thirty years later and clearly under the influence of Rousseau, Friedrich Schiller initiated the strongest link between self-consciousness and the child. In his essay “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry” (1795), Schiller aligns the child with the “naïve,” which—in ancient literature, in children, and in ancient peoples—consists of a direct, unmitigated, unconscious identification with nature.¹⁶⁴ Conversely, the “sentimental”—which for Schiller includes adulthood, the literature of modernity, and modernity itself—is the product of our alienation from nature, and our self-conscious mourning of that alienation. In identifying childhood with the naïve, Schiller shapes the child into a figure of creativity, self-sufficiency, pure potentiality, wholeness, and consummate authenticity. He contrasts the “unmutilated” naturalness of childhood to the artificiality of “civilised humanity,” suggesting that the various demands of civilized society inevitably disfigure the adult self, and that the authenticity of the child rests on its isolation from the social (34). The notion of the child as existing in a state of autonomous separation, free from insidious interpolation and deformation by the social, reverberates through Romantic discourse. Furthermore, Schiller reverses what was still a cultural commonplace in the

late eighteenth century: the elevation of the rational, complete adult over the irrational, unshaped child. Schiller claims we adults do not look down on the weak, unformed child “from the height of our strength and perfection” but “from the *limitation* of our condition which is inseparable from the *determination* which we have reached” (23). The adult is radically determined, warped and solidified into an unnatural, externally imposed social role, and looks up longingly to the “limitless *indeterminable nature* of the child and to his pure innocence” (23). As adults, we regret having “abandoned” our childhood potentiality, and thus the “boundlessness” of the child will make him a “*sacred* object” (24). For the German and English Romantics, and for the Victorians and Edwardians who inherited their philosophy, to grow up is to experience a narrowing of possibilities, a hardening of what was formerly malleable into a shape much diminished from the expansive, amorphous self of the child. To grow up is to fall from boundlessness into boundedness.

It is important to recognize, however, two points about Schiller’s elevation of the child. First, as Goerge Boas notes, “when one has studied Schiller’s essay, one finds little in it which extols the child’s manners and thoughts.”¹⁶⁵ Like Rousseau, Schiller’s idealization of unselfconscious childhood does not grow out of any particular regard for actual children. Indeed, Schiller makes it clear that it is not so much actual children who are to be revered, but rather “it is an *idea* represented by them which we love in them” (22). In fact “the naive is a *childlike quality where it is no longer expected* and cannot therefore be attributed in the strictest sense to real childhood” (24). Their “perfection is no merit of their own” because they are what they are out of necessity, as nature is. And here we come to a crucial second point: however fallen the adult may be, adults remain morally and spiritually superior to the childlike and the natural because “[w]e are free and they are necessary; we change, they remain one” (22). In leaving

behind the admirable unity and potentiality of childhood, the adult advances spiritually toward the ideal end of a dialectical process: only when the naïve and the sentimental are combined will “the divine or the ideal” emerge (22). For Schiller, it would be a mistake to wish to regress into naïveté:

The nature for which you envy the unreasoning [such as children] is not worthy of any respect, any longing. It lies behind you, it must always lie behind you.

Abandoned by the ladder which carried you, there is now no other choice open to you than to seize the law consciously and voluntarily or to sink without hope of salvation into a bottomless pit....Think no more of *changing places* with [nature] but receive her into yourself and strive to wed her endless superiority to your endless privilege and from the two conceive the divine. (32)

In the image of the self-conscious modern receiving nature into himself, and combining his power and hers in wedded bliss in order to give birth to a new divinity, we might perceive a male Romantic fantasy of usurping the powers of female reproduction in order to assure complete autonomy.¹⁶⁶ In the meantime, until the divine apotheosis is accomplished adults are caught in the uncomfortable stage of self-consciousness, what Coleridge—who visited Germany and read the German philosophers—laments as a “between-ness,”¹⁶⁷ and must continue to strive towards the ideal by exercising their self-conscious minds in contemplation of unselfconscious objects—a contemplation that for many of the English Romantics takes the form of poetry.

Multiple critics have made the case that Romantic poetry was largely born out of the problem of self-consciousness. Deborah Forbes posits that lyric poetry is peculiarly well designed to embody and investigate the paradoxes of self-consciousness.”¹⁶⁸ Like Forbes, Michael O’Neill understands these paradoxes of self-consciousness not as a hindrance to

Romantic poetry but rather as productive of some of its most stunning effects.¹⁶⁹ English Romantic poets, Geoffrey Hartman argues, read and wrote in the belief that “self-consciousness cannot be overcome; and the very desire to overcome it, which poetry and imagination encourage, is part of a vital, dialectical movement of ‘soul-making.’”¹⁷⁰ Many Romantic poets grappled with self-consciousness through their art, poems which engaged the adult reader in his own process of reflection as a step forward in that dialectical movement towards transcendence. And yet often these same poets—Wordsworth and Coleridge most influentially—barred from the shelves of the nursery any reading that might engender a similar state of reflectiveness in child readers.

3.4 COLERIDGE, WORDSWORTH, AND AN ANTI-SELFCONSCIOUS CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

In the *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge theorizes a hierarchy of consciousness: at the bottom stands the being aware only of “pleasant or unpleasant sensations caused in him by external impressions”; at the top the one who “reflects on his own reflections.”¹⁷¹ These limits map on to the primary figures of his poem “Frost at Midnight,” the sleeping infant and the poet-speaker. In “Frost at Midnight” the reflection of the poet upon his childhood leads to another memory of remembering as a child—a hall of mirrors of self-consciousness that alienates the speaker from his surroundings but also leads to the creation of poetry. And yet the poet praises his sleeping baby for being so calm, inhabiting a state so unlike his father’s self-reflection that he “vexes meditation.”¹⁷² The speaker praises the unselfconscious child as though that mental stillness, that inability to reflect on the self were truly preferable, though it generates nothing.

The child's importance lies in providing an outward reflection of the poet, pinning Coleridge to the world so that he does not get lost in the hall of mirrors, memories, and reflections. The unselfconsciousness of the child is valued for its usefulness to the adult.

Likewise, Wordsworth's poetry has much to say about the self and self-consciousness, often in relation to childhood, but very little to say to children. Laurence Lockridge points out that Coleridge "used the word 'self' more insistently than any previous writer,"¹⁷³ but it was Wordsworth who went about coining a whole bevy of extraordinary reflexive adjectives with "self" as a prefix. Lane Cooper's *Concordance to the Poems of William Wordsworth* records fifty-three instances of "self" as a stand-alone word and a whopping 178 instances of "self" used as a prefix (with the *Prelude*'s "self-haunting" as perhaps the most famous), in addition to eighty-nine permutations of the term "conscious." Hazlitt opines that Wordsworth is the writer of his own times who most closely resembles Rousseau in his intense self-consciousness. Both, he proclaims, "wind their own being round whatever object occurs to them."¹⁷⁴ Certainly Wordsworth's poetry, from the *Lyrical Ballads* to the *Prelude*, consists primarily of an enquiry into the mind and being of the poet. Though the ostensible subject of his poems maybe be some aspect of the exterior world—commonly a "simple" or "naïve" object such as nature or a laborer or a child—contemplation of that object serves chiefly as a catalyst for self-examination. Interestingly, this pattern of observation and reflection in Wordsworth's poems aligns them with works of children's literature such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* (1778) and Sarah Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories* (1786), which employed a pattern, derived from Locke, of leading the child from observation of nature to reflection on their own moral being. Yet children's literature of this type was heartily denounced by Wordsworth—and his fellow English

Romantics—precisely because it would, they contended, lead children into premature self-consciousness.

Wordsworth's *Prelude* presents a most dire, and famous, warning against the dangers of wrong reading.¹⁷⁵ In Book V of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth contrasts the well-read Infant Prodigy with the Romantic (but quite possibly illiterate) figure of the Boy of Winander, a contrast that exemplifies, as Judith Plotz puts it, the poet's "notoriously violent" and hugely influential "contempt for premature self-consciousness."¹⁷⁶ The Infant Prodigy's educational reading has made him self-conscious, so that he can only be said to be "innocent himself" insofar as he "can read lectures upon innocence"¹⁷⁷ and self-consciously emulate what he reads (V.312-3). Of course, as per the Romantic ideal, true innocence cannot know itself to be innocent, which is why we smile fondly with Wendy in *Peter Pan* when her young and innocent daughter exclaims "I do wish I were young and innocent!"¹⁷⁸ Plotz notes that true innocence, for Wordsworth and the Romantics, is "privative," characterized not as a positive quality to be willfully cultivated through self-reflection but as a "lack of self-conscious knowledge."¹⁷⁹ In contrast to the unconscious Romantic babe, the Infant Prodigy has un-child-like powers of self-reflection, keeps tabs on his own mind, and "must live / Knowing that he grows wiser every day," anxiously conscious of his growing stockpile of useful learning (V.341-2). Wordsworth depicts him as a horrifying freak of nature worthy of the carnival sideshow; he is a "monster birth," (V.292) a "dwarf man," (V.295) not a child anymore but not yet an adult either, a kind of grotesque figure prematurely issued forth from the womb of childhood. As a "noontide shadow of a man" (V.297) (that is, a nothing, since a man casts no shadow when the sun reaches its apex) the Infant Prodigy has been divested of his sacred unconscious joy and takes delight instead in adroitly

deconstructing subtle social interactions and reading the wonders of nature as though they were cold compendiums of scientific knowledge, mere objects of study.

Wordsworth argues that rather than be trapped in “the pinfold of his own conceit,” (V.362) made tragically self-conscious by the didactic literature crammed into his over-taxed brain, the child should instead be given what the poet estimates to be proper children’s literature—fairy tales and fables. The child given tales of Jack the Giant-killer and Robin Hood reaps a “precious gain,” for absorbed in the fantastical literature “he forgets himself” (V.369). Like Coleridge, then, Wordsworth identifies tales of wonder as the proper literature of childhood for the very reason that he believes fantastic literature to keep the child unselfconscious. Even better, however, for Wordsworth, is the child who eschews books entirely and learns from that “wiser spirit” (V.385) nature—not reading it as a compendium of scientific fact like the Infant Prodigy, but simply letting it “enter unawares into his mind” (V.410) like the Boy of Winander. This nature child Wordsworth describes as a lonely figure communing directly and wordlessly with the owls, the rocks, the streams and the woods. Unlike the Infant Prodigy, his powers have nothing to do with the social; his powers come from his autonomy, his unity with nature, and his unconsciousness. As Plotz points out, Wordsworth effects a “systematic transvaluation—by redefinition or omission—both of children’s inadequacies (ignorance and naïveté are promoted) *and* competencies (precocity and work skills are demoted).”¹⁸⁰

Like Schiller, Wordsworth values the unboundedness of the child not yet interpolated into a prescribed social role, and de-values the supposed limitations of self-consciousness. If the Romantic child can even be said to *have* a self of which to be conscious, it is a self undifferentiated from animate and inanimate nature, undetermined by the specificity of relations to other humans, pre-social, numinous, *and exactly identical in each individual incarnation.*

Each Romantic child has the same self as all the others, because it is a self defined by a lack of definition, by continuity, by eternalness. The tragedy of becoming self-conscious, against which nineteenth century adults are so eager to guard their children, is exactly the process of acquiring a socially aware, socially determined self. Thus the answer to the question “What should children read?”—a question asked repeatedly over the course of the nineteenth century—is almost always “literature that will prevent the dawning of self-consciousness,” which can also be understood as “literature that will prevent the construction of the social self.”

The suggestions for children’s reading material issued by the great Romantic thinkers and poets are echoed and re-echoed throughout the nineteenth century. In 1891 E. M. Field criticizes “our school-reading books” for being “over-full of instruction” and children’s stories for being not “*for* children, but stories *about* children, careful dissections of character” that seem “calculated to make the child-reader sadly self-conscious.”¹⁸¹ As a result of this promotion of self-consciousness in children’s literature, Field claims, children “live less in their own fairy world; ‘Heaven lies about them in their infancy’ less than formerly; they are more quickly grown up and dispel the glamour of those happy mists of childhood.”¹⁸² While she concedes that children must be educated, she pleads that “children should be children—while they can.”¹⁸³ Echoes of Wordsworth, indeed; quite literally Field echoes the Romantic poet in the form of the famous quote from the Immortality Ode; but also she echoes the Romantic alignment of the “fairy world” with “the mists of childhood,” and the notion that growing up means being barred from the cherished state of childhood. Growing up means loss, and the proper children’s literature should stave off that loss by preventing the insidious growth of self-consciousness in the child.

3.5 CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN TRANSITION: HOLIDAY HOUSE AND THE FAIRY BOWER

We can see some of the ways in which these prescriptions began to shape children's literature by taking a look at two transitional novels: Catherine Sinclair's *Holiday House* (1839) and Harriet Mozley's *The Fairy Bower* (1841). Critics have tended to interpret *Holiday House* in terms bequeathed to us by the Romantics: as casting mischief in "an amusing light," "perhaps for the first time"¹⁸⁴ in children's literature; as inaugurating the tradition of "delight"—as opposed to an earlier, and regrettable, preoccupation with "instruction"—in children's literature¹⁸⁵; and as thankfully doing away with "pious prigs" and "idle and dishonest imps of Satan" in favor of children who are neither "unnaturally good or unnaturally bad."¹⁸⁶ Sinclair's own preface to the novel teaches us to read this way. Her opening sentence recalls at once Thomas Carlyle's "Signs of the Times" (1829) in its alarm about the mechanization of humanity and Wordsworth's warnings that schoolrooms have alienated children from nature:

The minds of young people are now manufactured like webs of linen, all alike, and nothing left up to nature. From the hour when children can speak, till they come to years of discretion or of indiscretion, they are carefully prompted what to say, and what to think, and what to look, and how to feel; while in most school-rooms nature has been turned out of doors with obloquy, and art has entirely supplanted her. (v)¹⁸⁷

As an antidote to the mind-manufacturing tendencies of instructional literature, Sinclair undertakes to portray a different "species" of children, noisy, frolicsome, mischievous children

who are certainly no Master Billy and Miss Ann, and in fact have never even met that vexing pair, not being the most studious or reflective of readers.

The puzzle in this book is the (mostly absent) presence of Harry and Laura's older brother Frank, who does get "stories about bad boys and good boys" from his mother ("all very interesting, and all told on purpose to show how much happier obedient children are, than those who waste their time in idleness and folly") and himself reads like a pattern child of the old school (1-2). As Mrs. Crabtree remarks, he "speak[s] like a printed book sometimes" (61). His goodness takes the form of, among other things, complete unselfconsciousness: "Frank was so completely unselfish, that Peter Grey once laughingly said, 'Frank scarcely remembers there is such a person as himself in the world, therefore it is astonishing how he contrives to exist at all'" (263). Yet for all his goodness, his main role in the novel is to die, not nobly and with a brave smile on his face, but painfully and fretfully, taking a number of tense and dreary chapters to finally pass away. The grimness of his fate in this otherwise rollicking romp of a novel adds ambivalence to the status of good boy, and Robin Hoffman suggests that perhaps we should read Frank more as a caution *against* pattern children than an approving portrait of a good boy.¹⁸⁸

Harry and Laura's own brand of unselfconsciousness is at once more lauded by the novel and, not coincidentally, more Romantic.

Neither of these children intended any harm, for they were only heedless lively romps, who would not for twenty worlds have told a lie, or done a shabby thing, or taken what did not belong to them. They were not greedy either, and would not on any account have resembled Peter Grey, who was at the same school with Frank, and who spent all his own pocket-money, and borrowed a great deal of other people's, to squander at the pastry-cook's....Harry was not a cruel boy

either; he never lashed his pony, beat his dog, pinched his sister, or killed any butterflies, though he often chased them for fun, and one day he even defended a wasp, at the risk of being stung, when Mrs. Crabtree intended to kill it. (6-7)

They are “bad” in all the right ways (and, emphatically, none of the wrong ones), “heedless” and unselfconscious in a way that also makes them unselfish and neither greedy, nor underhanded, nor calculating. Uncle David openly encourages their “thoughtless and forgetful” ways (87). He praises Laura for spending her pocket-money right away, declaring that “he cannot endure saving children, and that he wishes all money were turned into slates, when little girls keep it longer than a week” (56). Clearly the eighteenth-century lessons of keeping clean accounts and saving one’s money have gone out of style, perhaps because they require calculation and not heedlessness. Reflection is something the children are happily free from until the illness of Frank. Before then, it is their very un-reflective nature that both gets them into scrapes and excuses them from blame for those scrapes. But though this book bears the mark of the Romantic’s elevation of the unselfconscious child, it also appears to teach that heedless childhood comes, appropriately, with an expiration date.

In the story-within-a-story that occurs at about the halfway point of the book, both reflection and bookishness are recommended. A young naughty Master No-book, after wasting his hours idly, is seized to be eaten by a giant named Snap-‘em-up. While he hangs in the larder, awaiting his hour of cooking, Master No-book has time for the first time to do a little self-examination: “[T]he wretched boy began at last to reflect seriously upon his former ways” (190). Thus in the middle of the novel, for the first time, reflection seems to be recommended to the child reader. Of course No-book is saved and reformed and becomes a paragon of industry. Shortly hereafter, grandmama Lady Harriet observes to Frank that we *should* read about

paragons of virtue: “Our leisure should be bestowed on reading of wiser and better people than ourselves, which will keep us humble while it instructs our understandings, and thus we shall be fitted to associate with persons whose society is even better than books” (199). Again, this constitutes a drastic change from where the book begins.

As Harry and Laura travel by steamboat to the bedside of the dying Frank, we get the portrait of an irritable old woman, Mrs. Percival, who complains loudly and bitterly of every inconvenience, and seems convinced that the Captain, steward, engineer, and weather all function in reference to herself alone. It seems an oddly bad-natured comic portrait of curious placement in this otherwise generous and gently humored book; but in fact it serves as a contrast to the behavior of Frank—and Harry and Laura—in the final chapters. Frank knows he is dying, but endeavors all the time to resign himself happily to his fate and give his loved ones as little cause for concern as possible. Likewise, Harry and Laura, when finally reunited with their brother, are enjoined to show no signs of their distress at his deterioration, so that they do not excite him so as to surely kill him immediately. Thus the last two chapters of the book go on with all parties refusing to indulge their own feelings in front of one another, and trying their utmost to serve each other rather than think of themselves. Frank keeps his deathbed reflections in a diary rather than troubling others with his thoughts: “he kept a little book in which were carefully recorded such texts and reflections as he considered likely to strengthen his own faith, and to comfort those he left behind” (341) By the last pages of the book, Harry and Laura are grave, pious, self-reflecting pattern children: “All was changed within and around them,—sorrow had filled their hearts, and no longer merry, thoughtless young creatures, believing the world one scene of frolicsome enjoyment and careless ease” (353). The sobering and dull ending to the

book suggests that leaving behind heedless childhood might be necessary, but the entrance into self-consciousness cannot but be a cause for mourning.

Harriet Mozley's *The Fairy Bower* is, like Sinclair's *Holiday House*, a children's novel that combines, with some confusion, late-eighteenth-century thought on children with Romantic ideals of childhood. Also like Sinclair, Harriet Mozley uses the occasion of her preface to declare against pattern children in children's literature. The opening sentence of the "Advertisement" establishes this book in contradistinction to the pattern good (or bad) girls and boys of the rational tale for children: "It is hoped that the following Tale may be looked upon as an attempt rather to represent characters as they really are, than to exhibit moral portraitures for unreserved imitation or avoidance" (6).¹⁸⁹ Portraits, like the good boys and girls of moral literature, are famously "improved" versions of the living subject, and Mozley purports to eschew such enhancement in her penning of child characters. Yet her protagonist, Grace Leslie, is a pattern child in many ways, as a quick summary of the novel will evince. *The Fairy Bower* unfolds the story of a party of children gathered, with their elders, into a grand home for a celebration of the coming new year. In private conversation with another child, Mary Anne, young Grace offhandedly suggests a scheme of crafting paper flowers in order to make up an anteroom as a fairy bower, for the amusement of the party, and finds the next day that Mary Anne has proposed the idea to the other children as her own. Grace, unsure of how to react, decides not to out the other girl's deception. Despite her best intentions though, Grace's friends and admirers eventually guess at and expose the truth. Grace is relieved to no longer keep her secret, but also wonders—seemingly without resolution—whether she behaved rightly by not speaking up sooner. Mostly, Grace's own doubts aside, the novel casts her as an unfailingly good girl, properly reticent, unconditionally sympathetic, and well-versed in the art of self-control. So

while the preface might lead us to expect the untamed child of nature precious to the Romantics, what we get with Grace looks a lot more like the socially adept and quietly self-reflecting children of Maria Edgeworth's rational tales.

The novel does in fact show traces of Wordsworthian Romanticism. The title page trumpets forth an epigraph from a Wordsworth poem—but one of the most Evangelical-friendly of his poems: the “Ode to Duty,” a paean to those who do good unthinkingly, without needing to be conscious of anyone—even God—watching. The novel abounds in critiques of various educational systems, critiques in line with Romantic warnings about over-educating the young. Mrs. Leslie seems to have done the best job of educating her daughter, mainly by virtue of not thinking much about the matter: “Mrs. Leslie had not studied the subject of education, like some mothers, and did not feel capable of forming any original plans” (11). Her convictions about the bringing up of children are few; she believes in the unwavering routine of daily lessons, and feels that children should not mix too much with adults—she herself is “of a temper to feel the objection of the constant presence of other people’s children” (286). In this, Mrs. Leslie anticipates many late-century pundits who objected to the practice of trotting out children for display to company. Mrs. Leslie’s “great simplicity of mind,” which Grace, we are told, inherited, makes her the consistent moral compass of the tale (193). Another of her convictions involves preserving the privacy of Grace’s mental world. Grace does not often put her thoughts into words, and Mrs. Leslie thinks “she had best perhaps not be made to,” implying that articulating her mind would somehow be a detriment to Grace, perhaps because it would require her to think too much about her own thoughts (10).

Mozley also critiques several adult characters who fault Grace for her reticence—for not, essentially affecting sensibility—and who suspect her, paradoxically, of affecting simplicity. The

concern about affectation in children is one thing one which the older and newer models of ideal childhood agree. Late-eighteenth-century child characters like Maria Edgeworth's Simple Susan evidenced an anxiety that a child's genuine simplicity might be mistaken for affectation, as happens with Grace. Grace's simplicity is mistaken for affectation or "a great slyness" (211)—she is "too grave for a child" (122) and seems to be acting the part of an un-spirited adult to many onlookers. These mistaken adults prefer the antics of more expressive children, such as Anna Wilson, a virtuoso practitioner of the art of emotional display who faints, cries, and has "strong hysterics" in public (17). Her mother, Mrs. Wilson, doubts whether Grace isn't "perfectly insensible" (14):

I never could bear that child; I am sure it would break my heart if my dear Anna showed so little sensibility. Why she cries at the least appearance of distress; do you know, one day she came in sobbing as if her little heart would break, because she was afraid she had hurt a 'poor, poor butterfly,' she had been trying in vain to catch; and if she thinks me unhappy, or even displeased, I am sometimes afraid she will go into fits. But then she has a very tender heart, and such wonderfully refined feelings for a child of her age. (15)

Of course, we as readers are invited to see that Anna Wilson's outbursts of "sensibility" are pure affectation, meant to disguise tears of pique at being unsuccessful at her butterfly hunt, or to persuade her mother to administer sympathy rather than a scolding. Through Grace's aunt's replies to Mrs. Wilson, we can see that Grace saves her tears and prayers for private moments when she believes herself unobserved, so as to spare her mother and others the distress of observing her pain. Where Anna practices an affectation of sensibility to manipulate social situations, Grace shows true empathy for others by concealing her sincere sensibility. The book

thus quickly establishes her reticence in matters of thought and feeling, a reticence that establishes the depths of both her mind and heart, but which also make her in some ways unsociable, or at least incapable of carrying out the same social manners fashionable among her set.

As Grace joins a party of children at the home of her Aunt Williams for the New Year's season, her quiet, modest ways continue to be illuminated by contrast with the theatrical Williams children, George and Emily, who do spot-on impressions of the adult company and propose mock trials, as well as in contradistinction to the Duff girls, who make a great show of outward piety, and "silly and affected" Isabella Ward, a little girl who puts on such sophisticated mannerisms—and such extravagant dress—that "it is difficult...to believe she is not a woman" (146): "Her manners were more than *womanly*: and so anxious was she for her dignity, that with children, they appeared little less than a piece of acting" (56). All these children, Grace excepted, make theater of their feelings in order to establish their social position, whether that position is clever youth, righteous abstainer, or distinguished lady. Grace instead projects little more than caution in society, prompting puzzlement and sometimes hostility from her fellows: "I says she's a little old maid, and a tiresome squeamish prude," George declares when Grace refuses to accept a bet that she cannot jump a gate (91). Yet eventually all of the children—with, perhaps, the exception of the devious Mary Anne—come to respect Grace's rectitude and admire her sympathetic and gentle nature.

Another element of Grace's character which Edgeworth and Wordsworth would have agreed to bestow approval upon is her reluctance to become the center of adult attention. Mrs. Leslie feels that children should not mix too much with adults—she herself is "of a temper to feel the objection of the constant presence of other people's children" (286). In this, Mrs. Leslie

echoes Edgeworth's advice to keep children out of adult conversations, channels Wordsworth's preference for separating the child from the social, and anticipates many late-century pundits who objected to the practice of trotting out children for display to company. For example, an 1879 article titled "Tyrants of the Nineteenth Century" bemoans the prevalence of the self-conscious child, "the little mincing, studied, over-conscious mannikin or womankin, that can sustain with perfect self-possession the attention of some twenty or thirty people,"¹⁹⁰ and that wields absolute power in the middle-class home. Far from a little womankin who struts on the domestic stage, Grace cannot even imagine why adults might enjoy the company of children. She "wonder[s] very much why people should like to see children, and said she was sure they only said so from kindness" to her mother (206).

When the spotlight does fall on Grace, her wariness of it protects her from becoming theatrical. Her godfather Mr. Everard, before all the company at dinner one night, declaims an original poem figuring the child as one of the ancient Graces; Grace, overcome with anxiety, manages a proper response, in verse, that clearly demonstrates her classical learning, but doesn't even realize she has been complimented by these attentions until her mother alerts her to the fact later. In fact, on this occasion, as usual, she "received praise as a piece of politeness to her momma" (210). The narrator, quick to support Grace's supposition, adds: "which, in fact, the praises of children usually are" (210). In contrast, Mary Anne Duff revels in the spotlight when singled out for praise from the whole company for designing a delightful fairy bower—the idea which, known only to Mary Anne, Grace and Emily, originated in truth with Grace. Though she should be ashamed of herself for her deception, "[s]o blunted were her feelings by self" that Mary Anne frequently forgets her crime and accepts the compliments she considers her due (169). The novel asks its readers to understand that the difference between Mary Anne and Grace

is precisely a difference of self—or rather of consciousness of self. Mary Anne, thinking always of herself, acts badly; Grace, thinking of others, instinctively does right. When Mary Anne’s deception is uncovered, it happens off-stage, so to speak, Mozley “spar[ing] her the degradation of exhibiting her personally in her well merited exposure” (285). One wonders whether Mozley isn’t rather denying the spotlight-loving sneak the satisfaction of another satisfyingly theatrical scene.

Despite *The Fairy Bower*’s evidence of Wordsworthian influence, it remains a distinctly transitional work of children’s literature, with plenty vestiges of a pre-Romantic sensibility about children. For instance, the novel opens on a scene of Grace absorbed in reading, not fairy tales, but what appears to be a domestic tale, probably full of pattern children. She also engages habitually in Mary-Gilbert-esque bouts of deep and often troubling metaphysical reflection. Some days she wakes early and lies abed full of “thoughts and reveries on her past and present being; the existence and character of God; the true meaning of that, to her, most awful word—Eternity; the fearful sense of the doctrine of eternal punishment” and “numberless topics” likewise deep and perplexing enough to prove “that there is the germ of philosophic yearning, and heretical wanderings in the mind, as soon as it is capable of embracing a thought, or receiving any revealed doctrine” (12). The mention of heresy casts doubt on whether a child like Grace *should* be indulging such “wanderings.” The other time for fancies is when she plays the piano, which leads most often to thoughts of her beloved mother.

She would think, “What a small creature I am! but what great things I can think, and nobody knows my thoughts! Yes, I suppose God knows them. I am sure He does, though I cannot think how; and besides, I think mamma knows them; I think all mothers must have the power of knowing their children’s thoughts. She does

not say so, but I think mamma knows all mine.” Then she would get bewildered in the mazes of metaphysics. (12)

Like Lewis Carroll’s Alice, Grace sometimes finds herself puzzling over what it means to be herself and not another—what is self, anyway?—a query that lands her again in the “depths of metaphysics” (85). Those mazes and depths do not seem at all like the proper place for a child, judging by Grace’s relief when she shakes herself free of them, and these passages seem ambivalent. Mozley seeks to establish at once that Grace is a pious and thoughtful child *and* that being thoughtful and pious can lead her into trouble.

The plot of the novel, of course, turns on a similar paradox: Grace keeps a secret because she hesitates to shame another girl, but in keeping the secret lets the girl be ensnared in further sins. In fact, the whole point of the book might be that had she thought less and acted more spontaneously, the entire mix-up of the bower might have been avoided. It does become difficult to adjudicate whether Grace’s timidity isn’t rather a fault. Her quiet rectitude keeps her from coming forward to claim ownership of the fairy bower, thus allowing the morally weak Mary Anne to fall further into disgrace as she follows one lie with another to keep up the pretense that the fairy bower is rightfully hers. She is too thoughtful and good to rat on her friend, but also too paralyzed by wondering what is the right thing to do that she fails to save the poor girl from sinking deeper into iniquity. There is, maybe, something of Hamlet about Grace. At the end of the novel, after Mr. Everard steps in to reveal the truth of the situation to all involved, Grace expresses vague regrets to her mother:

“I am still sure, mamma, that I was wrong,” returned Grace, once more, with a mixture of humility and heroism natural only in characters as hers. “I have thought that if the story of the Fairy Bower were written and read, a good many

people would say I was wrong, and I should be among the number myself. I
think I shall say so all my life.” (294)

Of course that story has been written by Harriet Mozley, but in reading it one finds it hard to say where Grace went wrong. Though Grace herself feels all would have been amended had she immediately informed her mother of the truth, her mother assures her that she would have done just as Grace did in her place. Given Mrs. Leslie’s position as the novel’s moral compass, should her words assure us as readers that Grace never did go wrong? Was Grace too simple and retiring, to the detriment of another girl’s character, or would any other course of action have tainted that simplicity?

The epigraph to the chapter following Grace’s meta-statement about the reading of her own story only complicates the issue. Taken from Wordsworth’s “Character of the Happy Warrior,” the epigraph is a single, misquoted half-line: “Daily self surpassed,” (295) reads Mozley’s version; Wordsworth’s phrase was hyphenated, “daily self-surpast.”¹⁹¹ In Wordsworth’s poem on the death of Nelson at Trafalgar, “daily self-surpassed” refers to the hero’s habit of improving on his valiant deeds day by day—he surpasses his own former feats. Mozley’s slight edit gives us a phrase that, referring to the “humility and heroism” of Grace, seems more to indicate that daily Graces surpasses her self by her empathy and selflessness. In other words, she does not improve on her earlier feats of heroism by topping them with ever more glorious exploits like a little Nelson, but rather every day she puts aside her self and acts in accordance with the needs of others. Does this encomium absolve her of any guilt in the affair of the fairy bower?

The bower itself is a strange artifact for Grace to create: does she conjure nature out of paper like a powerful Romantic child? Or does she excel at artifice in a highly un-Romantic and

un-naïve way? After all Schiller notes that our admiration of the naive presupposes that “neither affectation nor any other accidental interest plays a part”¹⁹²: “If one could give an artificial flower the appearance of nature so that it deceived completely, then the discovery that it was imitation would completely destroy the feeling under discussion.”¹⁹³ The confusion of values in this novel stands as evidence of its status as a transitional novel that retains some elements of late-eighteenth-century children’s literature’s promotion of clever, self-aware children, but also embraces a new Romantic paradigm of the unselfconscious child.

That paradigm is largely responsible for the shape of the canon of Golden Age children’s literature. As my next chapter will argue, one of the Golden Age’s most beloved creations, Peter Pan, is a complex response to the paradigm of the unselfconscious child. But it should be noted that even as this Romantic invention, the unselfconscious child, came to dominate the Victorian imaginary, it did not completely edge out the kinds of semi-old-fashioned, sometimes self-reflective childhood seen in Sinclair’s *Holiday House* and Mozley’s *Fairy Bower*. Frances Hodgson Burnett, for example, recalled her own childhood as free of self-consciousness and yet wrote child characters who are at home in adult society and who display strong signs of self-consciousness.¹⁹⁴

In her memoir of her childhood, *The One I Knew Best of All* (1893), Burnett firmly disassociated her adult narrating self from her remembered child self by using first person pronouns for the former and third person pronouns for the latter, as when she writes, “I have not the remotest idea of what she looked like.”¹⁹⁵ The child Burnett, referred to as the Small Person, is syntactically quarantined from the self-conscious act of memoir-writing in which the adult Burnett engages. The first pages of the memoir further insist on the Small Person’s utter lack of self-consciousness; Burnett-the-narrator claims to be unable to recall “what the looking-glass

reflected back” at the Small Person, a sly way of insisting that her child self was so completely unselfconscious as to accord no importance to her reflection in the mirror: “there were so many serious and interesting problems to be attended to that a reflection in the looking-glass was an unimportant detail.”¹⁹⁶ As adult narrator, Burnett continues to assert the Small Person’s lack of self-consciousness by emphasizing that “I do not remember regarding her as a personality at all,”¹⁹⁷ so as to suggest that the child Burnett didn’t even have a sense of self of which to be conscious. Even though she became a voracious reader as a very young child, Burnett stresses that the Small Person remained unselfconscious:

She wanted stories -- any kind of stories -- every kind -- anything from a romance to a newspaper anecdote. She was a simple, omnivorous creature. She had no precocious views about her mind or her intellectual condition. She reflected no more on her mind than she did on her plump legs and arms -- not so much, because they were frequently made red and smarting by the English east winds -- and it did not occur to her that she had an intellectual condition.¹⁹⁸

Burnett’s childhood reading was not limited to children’s fantasy with its Coleridgean seal of approval, its promise to guard against self-consciousness; nevertheless, Burnett reports that her childhood unconsciousness was never imperiled by her wide and sophisticated reading, perhaps because her other chief occupation was frolicking on the grounds of her home—a garden which she pointedly calls “The Back Garden of Eden.” Perhaps readers are meant to understand that this natural “fairyland” counteracted the effects of all of those novels and newspapers.

Yet however strong her disavowal of self-consciousness in her own childhood, Burnett did not write completely unselfconscious child characters. She frequently describes both Little Lord Fauntleroy and Sara Crewe of *A Little Princess* as “old-fashioned,” a term that in the

nineteenth century was used to mark a child as serious and even unchildlike. In an 1893 *MacMillan's* article Frederic Adye observes that the old-fashioned child's mind is "not necessarily morbid, but introspective and reflective beyond its years."¹⁹⁹ R. L. Green's article on Golden Age literature notes that in writing Mary Lennox and Colin Craven of *The Secret Garden*, Burnett evinced an "unusual understanding of introspective unlikeable children."²⁰⁰ In Green's early exercise in forming a canon of children's literature, Burnett's *Secret Garden* is considered an oddity for its inclusion of these self-conscious and thus unlikeable children, but the novel squeaks into the canon anyway, probably because its conclusion sees both Mary and Colin reformed into garden-dwelling Romantic children.

Burnett's work gives us an example of the uneven developments of formations concerning childhood and self-consciousness. Her memoir and her fictions for children seem to indicate that while she herself was a bit of an infant prodigy, and while she enjoys writing infant prodigies—the term was applied to both *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *Sara Crewe* by unfriendly critics—she also felt the influence of the trend towards strenuously denying the precocious self-consciousness of children. Another indication that the older ideals of self-reflective childhood did not disappear is the continued popularity of domestic novels for children, with their emphasis on social interaction and self-regulation. Though the early twentieth-century formation of a canon of children's literature may have highlighted works of Victorian and Edwardian fantasy—the *Alice* books, *The Wind in the Willows*, etc—domestic realism maintained a strong presence in the Victorian nursery. The domestic tales of Maria Edgeworth, Sarah Trimmer, and Mary Sherwood kept their places on children's bookshelves well into the Victorian years, and were joined by works of domestic realism by Mary Louisa Molesworth and Charlotte Yonge.

My next chapter will focus on one very well-known figure from children's literature—Peter Pan—who both calls attention to and solves a cultural paradox that results from the particularly Victorian permutations of thought on childhood and self-consciousness. Just as domestic realism (with its old-fashioned self-reflective child characters) maintained a presence in the Victorian nursery library despite the fact of the growing prejudice against self-consciousness in children, many Victorians praised the increasingly visible phenomenon of child stage performers despite the fact that many other Victorians reviled all signs of self-conscious performance in the young, including and maybe especially the child on the stage. For the most part these kinds of uneven developments mean that conflicting paradigms exist within a culture in a constant state of tension. Peter Pan, as the next chapter will contend, is the rare figure that manages to imaginatively dispel that tension. He does so by convincing his audiences of the possibility of a totally unselfconscious stage child.

4.0 THE RIDDLE OF PETER PAN'S EXISTENCE: AN UNSELFCONSCIOUS STAGE CHILD

You're not as *natural*, when acting the Duke, as you were when you acted Alice. You seemed to me not to forget *yourself* enough....If you are ever to be a *good* actress (as I hope you will), you must learn to *forget* "Isa" altogether, and *be* the character you are playing....and *do* forget that there's anybody else listening!

---Lewis Carroll, letter to child actress Isa Bowman, 4 April 1889, after seeing her performance of the Duke of York in *Richard III*²⁰¹

For a large portion of adults in the nineteenth century, sometimes a child was not a child. Following the re-theorization of children and self-consciousness by writers such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one quality that could disqualify a young person from the exalted state of childhood was self-consciousness. In 1879, the British periodical *Golden Hours*, an illustrated magazine for family reading, ran a two-part article—titled “Tyrants of the Nineteenth Century”—lamenting what it identified as the growing cultural phenomenon of the self-conscious child, “the little mincing, studied, over-conscious mannikin or womankin, that can sustain with perfect self-possession the attention of some twenty or thirty people.”²⁰² With palpable disdain, the *Golden Hours* writer denounced the reign of the tyrannical child who wields absolute power in the middle-class home, demanding unceasing attention and admiration from parents, servants, and guests alike. The “spoilt, self-conscious, clever darling”²⁰³ that so disgusted the *Golden Hours* writer—and so many Victorian and Edwardian adults, as I will

show—is positioned here as the despotic star of its very own domestic stage, whose immodesty, self-consciousness, and self-possession are necessary enablers of “its performance of the part it has to play.”²⁰⁴

Given that the self-consciousness of the child who struts in the figurative spotlight of the home could inspire such revulsion, it comes as no surprise that the self-conscious child who strode the boards of the actual theater could elicit a storm of controversy. On the one hand, the widespread loathing for precocity in stage children hinged on their critics’ perception that stage children were supremely self-conscious. Those who expressed antipathy for the self-conscious stage child contrasted him with the properly unconscious child whose “beautiful timidity,” as the *Golden Hours* writer puts it, amounts to a blessed “kind of ‘stage fright.’”²⁰⁵ On the other hand, the self-consciousness of the stage child is exactly what produced the artful theatricality that delighted so many theatergoers.²⁰⁶ The cultural tension between a commonly expressed predilection for the unconscious child and a similarly prevalent celebration of the theatrical child can be understood to hinge on whether the child is perceived as having a “self” and how the child can—and whether she should—have knowledge of that self. Both the domestic child actor and the professional juvenile performer can be understood to be not only conscious that they possess a self but also knowing enough to manipulate the effects that self has on adults. It is this self-aware manipulation of the audience by a child performer that weighs on Lewis Carroll’s mind when he writes to beg Isa Bowman to forget herself on stage, and moreover to forget the audience even exists.

These conversations about the unselfconscious child and the theatrical child converge in the discourse surrounding *Peter Pan* on the stage starting in 1904, and on the page beginning with Peter’s brief appearance in Barrie’s adult novel *The Little White Bird* (1902), and his more

fully elaborated literary presence in Barrie's novelization of the play in 1911 and his published play script of 1928. Peter combines the best of both worlds in that he is supremely theatrical while being at the same time entirely unconscious of himself—or, if you will, unconscious of his self.²⁰⁷ As Hook remarks in the novel version of Barrie's tale, *Peter and Wendy* (1911), "Peter did not know in the least who or what he was, which is the very pinnacle of good form."²⁰⁸

Situating the phenomenal popularity of *Peter Pan* in the Edwardian theater alongside the discourses of self-consciousness with regard to the figure of the child will help solve the riddle of Peter Pan's existence, a riddle that troubles both Hook and Peter. I argue that the answer to this riddle is that Peter effectively has no self of which to be conscious, and that by having no self he combines unselfconsciousness and theatricality—highly valued but seemingly antithetical characteristics often attributed to the child in the nineteenth century. Criticism of *Peter Pan* has yet to elucidate an important characteristic of the eternal boy: he is pure theatricality devoid of knowingness. This chapter will trace the development of anti-self-consciousness among the Victorians—both as a general cultural phenomenon and as it applied particularly to children and children's culture, literary and theatrical— and demonstrate that as a figure Peter embodies an impossible ideal for his anti-self-conscious audience—artfulness without self-consciousness.

4.1 VICTORIAN ANTI-SELFCONSCIOUSNESS

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Romantic writers like Friedrich Schiller, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge positioned the entrance of both cultures and individuals into self-consciousness as a kind of fortunate fall. In their dialectical configuration, the fall from originary, unselfconscious wholeness and grace into self-consciousness alienates

humans from nature and themselves, but fortunately also moves them towards a higher ideal of conscious unity with divinity, whether that divinity is figured as spiritual transcendence or as God. Many Victorians inherited their Romantic forbears' preoccupation with self-consciousness but found it more difficult to see the fortune in the fall. The prospect of an eventual transcendence dimmed as the century waned, until self-consciousness came to seem a soul-crushing modern curse, a nearly inescapable pall on human life whose horrors, by way of contrast, only further sanctified the idyllic unselfconscious space that the culture held childhood to be.

Self-conscious reflection is one version of the ideal of critical distance that Amanda Anderson, in *Powers of Distance* (2001), locates behind an array of Victorian projects, including “the prevalent project of *Bildung*, or the self-reflexive cultivation of character.”²⁰⁹ Anderson notes that critical distance was an ideal for which Victorian scientists, social theorists, philosophers, and poets strove (remember that for Wordsworth poetry required emotion reflected upon retrospectively, from a distance), but also a general ideal for the self-fashioning middle class. Yet, as she points out, those who strove for critical distance were not without reservations about its effects:

[M]any Victorians were wary of certain distancing effects of modernity, including...forms of alienation and rootlessness that accompanied modern disenchantment, industrialization, and globalization of commerce. As a result many writers displayed a complex ambivalence toward the powers of modern distance.²¹⁰

The unselfconscious child—the child not standing at a distance from self—is a fantasy that corrects against the alienating perils of critical distance. Victorians wary of distance “elevate

modes of life and work that recover a lost, prereflective unity,” and for an age that inherited so many Romantic ideals, the unselfconscious child served as one of those elevated modes of being,²¹¹ and Peter Pan’s Neverland imaged the child’s prereflective unity as existing on an island both lost to adults but also briefly accessible through narrative and theater.

Thomas Carlyle identified self-consciousness as *the* plague of modern humanity. John Stuart Mill termed Carlyle’s narrative of diseased modernity an “anti-self-consciousness theory.”²¹² In *Sartor Resartus* (1836) Carlyle declared Coleridge’s imperative, “Know thyself,” to be an “impossible Precept,”²¹³ and Carlyle rejected self-reflection in favor of un-contemplative action. Where earlier discussions of self-consciousness as the Fall had meditated wistfully on the loss of original grace but looked forward to the attainment of a still greater apotheosis for humanity, Carlyle helped to initiate a new habit of dwelling on a less hopeful understanding of the fall into self-consciousness: the Fall as the entrance of evil and disease into human life. The 1831 essay “Characteristics” gives the fullest expression of Carlyle’s theorization of self-consciousness as an individual and cultural illness.²¹⁴ He begins with a medical truism, that the healthy are unconscious of their health; only the sick are conscious of the operations of their bodies, precisely because those operations have become disordered. Likewise, he argues, in matters “moral, intellectual, political, [and] poetical” (313) the “sign of health is Unconsciousness” (315) The very prevalence of inquiry in all of these categories during his time is to Carlyle proof that the nineteenth century suffers from the disorder of self-consciousness more than any age before. The pursuit of knowledge in science and metaphysics can only be, for Carlyle, a “symptom of Derangement” advanced to such a critical stage that even the memory of “paradisaic Unconsciousness has faded away into an ideal poetic dream” (314).

That paradise can be recalled most easily, Carlyle writes, by “looking back on young years”; again childhood operates as a prelapsarian, pre-self-conscious preserve of unity with oneself and nature, proof that the fallen state of the adult is not the rightful, natural state of humanity (313). Antedating the darkness of “diseased self-consciousness” when “everything lies impotent, lamed, its force turned inwards, and painfully listens to itself,” (326) childhood contained “seasons of a light, ærial translucency and elasticity and perfect freedom” (313):

We knew not that we had limbs, we only lifted, hurled and leapt; through eye and ear, and all avenues of sense, came clear unimpeded tidings from without, and from within issued clear victorious force; we stood as in the centre of Nature, giving and receiving, in harmony with it all; unlike Virgil's Husbandmen, “too happy *because* we did not know our blessedness.” (313-4)

Though Carlyle’s vision of self-conscious maturity is generally darker and more shadowed by sickness and morbidity than that of earlier writers, his depiction of pre-Fall childhood accords closely with what had come before. Childhood is a lost but lovingly remembered period of joyous unity, unconscious physicality, clear vision, and harmony with nature. If the tenor of the discourse on self-consciousness grew more shrill and discordant as the nineteenth century progressed, the exaltation of unselfconscious childhood remained an unwavering accompanying note, bolstered by the nineteenth-century theory that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, and thus children literally embody pre-modern humanity.

The enormous extent of Carlyle’s influence on Victorian thinking in general is without question, but here it will be useful to notice his influence on one particular acolyte: J. M. Barrie. Barrie’s mother, to whom he accredited his lifelong involvement in letters, regularly read her beloved fellow-Scot Carlyle aloud to her large family. Scholar Carol Anita Tarr documents

Barrie's familiarity with and admiration of Carlyle²¹⁵, whose name Barrie said "bulked largest next to Burns" in his home, and who was "the only writer I ever tried to imitate."²¹⁶ In fact the realm of Neverland gives geographic form to Carlyle's vision of childhood as an era of "paradisaic Unconsciousness," a kind of Eden before the Fall into self-conscious adulthood. When Peter refuses to join the Darling household, then, he returns to Neverland to remain in the season of a "light, aërial translucency and elasticity and perfect freedom," the timeless time—existing outside of modernity and the disease of self-consciousness—that Carlyle had declared childhood to be.

Carlyle's may be the most well-remembered voice against self-consciousness in the Victorian period, but plenty of others diagnosed their era with the same disease. In an essay on Jeremy Bentham, Mill fingered self-consciousness as the "dæmon of the men of genius of our time, from Wordsworth to Byron, from Goethe to Chateaubriand."²¹⁷ The effect of the growing prevalence of these metaphors of disease and demonism over the course of the nineteenth century is twofold. First, self-consciousness thus figured becomes an even more highly undesirable state; rather than merely lamentable in its distance from originary grace, self-consciousness is positively hellish, a filthy contamination of the human mind, body, and soul. Second, in its juxtaposition and opposition to this diseased and cursed state, childhood as the Eden of unselfconsciousness grows even more precious and exalted. By 1909 G.K. Chesterton, looking around him at contemporary London life, declares that one "cannot call up any wilder vision than a city in which men ask themselves if they have any selves."²¹⁸ In contrast to the sickly city of self-contemplation, childhood stands as a protected garden of unselfconscious health, a Neverland without the disease of modernity.

It is worth noting that these Victorian adherents to the anti-self-consciousness theory did not entirely despair of the possibility of escaping self-consciousness. Like Schiller and Coleridge before him, Carlyle did understand the passage through fallen self-consciousness to be a necessary evil on the way to the transcendence of humanity: self-consciousness may be both cause and symptom of the fallen-ness of humanity, but “it is also the attempt towards cure.”²¹⁹ The fever of self-conscious inquiry will burn itself out, he speculates, and humanity will tire of self-conscious skepticism and inquiry and return to faith. Mill believed himself to have effected a degree of transcendence above self-consciousness in his own lifetime and advised others that they could slough off the shackles of self-consciousness too. In his *Autobiography* (1873) he writes of breaking out from a period in which he was mired in self-conscious despair in part by realizing that happiness cannot be an end in itself—a refutation of his Benthamite upbringing—and in part by learning, from Wordsworth’s Immortality Ode, that there are “compensations”²²⁰ for self-consciousness. As Edward Alexander notes, Mill, unlike Carlyle, embraced the belief of the Romantic poets Wordsworth and Coleridge that the suffering of self-conscious analysis also leads to insight and the creation of art.²²¹ Thus in his inaugural address as Lord Rector of the University of St. Andrews, Mill affirmed that the “meditative self-consciousness” of the modern mind “has discovered depths in the human soul”²²² that surpass anything the unselfconscious ancients could have achieved. As will be discussed further, for all his unselfconscious dwelling in the prelapsarian Neverland, Peter Pan’s arrested development means he will never achieve Carlyle’s transcended state of humanity or Mill’s depths of the soul—a limitation that exposes some of the more disturbing implications of the doctrine of unselfconscious childhood.

4.2 CHILDREN, THEATER, AND SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

It is one of those puzzling examples of the ability of a culture to simultaneously hold seemingly antithetical ideas that so many Victorians and Edwardians, among them such connoisseurs of childhood as Lewis Carroll and J. M. Barrie, who were very much under the sway of the anti-self-consciousness doctrine, particularly in relation to children, could also esteem the child on stage so highly. The latter half of the nineteenth century saw increasing discomfort with any signs of self-consciousness in children, and theatricality in children—whether in the home or on the stage—was certainly one of those signs. And yet the Victorian and Edwardian theater swarmed with child performers—the stars who played Alice and Peter Pan, to be sure, but in much greater numbers the hundreds who swelled the ranks of the chorus—who had a complex relationship to self-consciousness and to their audiences. Perhaps because they believed that contact with the ideal of unselfconscious childhood was a balm to their alienated modern souls, adult audiences managed to enjoy the performances of stage children while at the same time denouncing the theatricality that they believed threatened to destroy the idyllic state of childhood.

Many writers voiced a widespread Victorian concern that the supposedly natural unselfconsciousness of childhood was threatened by the growth of what was variously referred to in article titles as “The Cult of the Child,” “Babyolatry,” and “The Worship of Children,” one sign of which was the growing presence of children on stage. But theatrical self-consciousness did not limit its threat to children on the literal stage: the figurative domestic stage posed many dangers itself. Doting middle-class parents of the nineteenth century did what parents of earlier times—the times when Maria Edgeworth warned that children should not be brought out in

company—did not do; they showed off their children, making them the center of the entire household instead of shuffling them off to a nursery on the periphery of the house, like the Darlings’ attic nursery. This new centrality of the child, writers fretted, had made children conscious of their own desirability, and thus consummate performers of the kinds of childhood adults valued, whether that was intellectual precocity—the child reciting poetry at a dinner for adults—or unconscious naivety—the child who says the darnedest things. What at mid-century was an apprehensive anxiety about what would happen when the celebrated “artlessness” of children “gets to know its power”²²³ and becomes an artful performance of itself, was by the end of the century for some adults a wholesale disgust with the supposedly charming little ways of childhood. *The Little Book of Bores* (1900), an abecedarium in which each letter pillories a particular brand of “Bore,” reserves T for the child forced upon adult company to elicit their admiration: “T is a Terrible Tot / Who says things he’d much better not. / A child of that age / Should be kept in a cage, / And fed—if at all—through a slot.”²²⁴ Here the concern is no longer for the fate of the child; the child depicted in the accompanying illustration is a monster disguised as an angel, a horror foisted upon adults so weary of showcased children that the gentleman interlocutor clutches his knees in suppressed rage at being confronted with this spectacle. The fad for introducing children into adult social situations, then, is here represented as being bad for the child, converting the valued quality of unselfconsciousness into a self-conscious performance of naiveté, exaggerated by the faux innocence of the finger in the mouth and the supposed unconsciousness of the risqué exposure of the doll clutched behind the back. But the lyric, with its facetious recommendation of child-imprisonment and starvation, seems more concerned for the ways in which the staging of the child in adult company is bad for the adult, who was so frequently a captive audience to the performances of adored children. Granted,

the adult in the upper left seems amused by whatever inappropriate utterance the child has just made, but the foregrounding of the distinctly un-amused gentleman and the tenor of the poem indicate that any adult amused by such a performance is only abetting the exasperating theatricalization of children.



Figure 2: "T is for Tot," Oliver Herford, *The Little Book of Bores* (1900)

At the same time as the anti-self-consciousness pundits employed the language of theatricality to condemn self-conscious children, audiences flocked to see the self-consciously performing child of the Victorian and Edwardian stage. The children's literature of the Golden Age was regularly adapted for the stage, with extremely popular productions of the *Alice* books, as well as Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *A Little Princess*, starring child actors, and bringing huge numbers of children *and* adults to Victorian theaters.²²⁵ Marah Gubar has written extensively about the phenomenal popularity of child actors not only as members of mixed-age casts like that of Peter Pan but also in all-child productions of fashionable shows like *H. M. S. Pinafore*.²²⁶ At home, the private theatrical, a common form of entertainment for and by middle-class families, often included children or was performed by a cast entirely made up of children.²²⁷ Even paintings of children performing were popular, with Charles Hunt making a specialty of painting at-home child productions of Shakespeare's tragedies and fairy tales for the Royal Academy. His oil painting of children performing the play-within-the-play scene from *Hamlet* includes both children who take their roles quite seriously—Claudius, Gertrude, Hamlet, and Ophelia—and those who approach the scene with more levity—the players performing the play within the play behind the curtains. In this case, it is the grinning boy who disregards the gravity of the scene—he is supposed to be on the verge of being murdered, after all—who seems more self-conscious, by virtue of his open gaze out at the audience of the painting, his awareness of being watched. His arguably poor performance evinces more self-consciousness than the more absorbed performances of the children fully engaged in their theatrical roles.



Figure 3: *Children acting the 'Play Scene' from "Hamlet,"* Charles Hunt (1863), Yale Center for British Art

But though the child who performed on a literal domestic stage was tolerated and even celebrated by the Victorians, it was no accident that when the author of the *Golden Hours* article with which I began this chapter fished for a metaphor with which to condemn self-conscious children, the one he came up with was theatrical. Children were obviously not new to the stage in the Victorian era; boy companies doing Shakespeare were popular in the sixteenth century, and the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century saw a spike in “Infant” performers in the theater. But the child on the stage arguably came to mean something new in the Victorian age. Following the work of historians of childhood such as Phillipe Ariès, sociologist Viviana Zelizer has traced

the transformation of the child from useful members of society before the nineteenth century (they were valuable as laborers or as the future of a dynasty), to “economically worthless, but emotionally priceless.” Zelizer points out that children on the stage “created a curious paradox,” in that they were “child laborers paid to represent the new, sentimentalized view of children.” This paradox was partly responsible for the fact that the child on the stage was a highly visible and highly controversial figure in Victorian culture, and as the work of Jacqueline Rose, Nina Auerbach, Anne Varty, Carolyn Steedman, and Marah Gubar has demonstrated, the stage child is a case that can tell us a lot about nineteenth-century constructions of the child.²²⁸ Indeed, the stage comprises an extremely important site on which competing notions about childhood and self-consciousness collided.

What is noteworthy about the enthusiasm for the child actor evinced by a culture that in large part adored the unselfconscious child is that the theatrical child was commonly remarked to exhibit precocious self-consciousness. Of course, as the instructional manuals for amateur theatricals show, not all acting done by children was understood to be a sign of precocity. In fact, one of the originators of the enthusiasm for the unselfconscious child characterized some childhood acting as inoffensive. The “little Actor”²²⁹ of Wordsworth’s *Immortality Ode* indulges in “endless imitation”²³⁰ of adult activities—weddings, funerals—with complete earnestness and unconscious absorption in his play, and all within the privacy of his home. Wordsworth characterizes him as neither precocious nor knowing, but simply as an instinctive mimic, blissfully unaware of any audience and acting only to please himself. His isolation in his own world of imaginative play and his total unselfconsciousness about performing preserve him as a Romantic child. The professionalized child actor is differentiated from Wordsworth’s natural child mimic by the publicness, precociousness, and self-consciousness of her performance. Her

precocity inheres not only in the worldly knowingness cultivated by her introduction into the adult public milieu of work but also in her self-conscious ability to please an audience. She shapes her performance on the stage to suit the wishes of her audience just as the adult self-consciously shapes behavior and ultimately self to suit the demands of the social milieu. Whether playing an adult role, or—perhaps even more troublesome for devotees of the Romantic child—performing childishness, the theatrical child was understood by many adults to be a supremely self-conscious being. And yet she too was beloved by huge numbers of Victorian and Edwardian theatergoers.²³¹

Some Victorian commentators on the theatrical child attempt to recover her Romantic-child simplicity by denying that stage-acting engenders premature self-consciousness in the juvenile performer. For example, the author of “The Child on the Stage” (1897)²³² acknowledges the misgivings of the “man in the stalls” (623) at a performance including a child actor: “Even the child who charms you on the stage arouses an admiration not unmixed with regret. Nor is the reason far to seek: she is a child who is consciously making believe” (624). Some audience members may find it difficult, the writer admits, to be “quite in love with the child on the stage” precisely because “she has grown self-conscious” (623). Before entering the theater, “it was her charm” that she was “always acting and never knew that her proceedings were not in dead earnest,” (623) much like Wordsworth’s “little Actor.” As a professional performer, though, she has fallen from the Edenic state of unconscious play:

Now she has eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and knows (what no child ought to know) that there is such a thing as acting. She is doing consciously and for the sake of applause what she ought to do without thought of reasons, as

naturally as she draws her breath or as the rose gives sweetness. She is of necessity precociously wise, and so we are a little sorry for her. (624)

To know that one's behavior can be self-consciously shaped, that it does not simply arise spontaneously and authentically from one's essential being, is what "no child ought to know." Self-consciousness casts out of the paradise of childhood the child who has sinned by knowing what a child should not. The writer of this article is quick to insist, however, that "a child is a child," and relates that when the little actress goes home her friends and family can attest that "she may be just as simple in her pleasures as her sisters who are actresses only in the ordinary way" (624). Furthermore, the writer maintains that "the baleful quality of self-consciousness may be developed just as well in the nursery as on the stage" (624). So even if the child actor does grow self-conscious, well, that's no worse than what happens to other children who have never trod the boards.

4.3 PETER PAN

While the Victorians and Edwardians could easily adore the unselfconscious performance of natural mimics like Wordsworth's "little Actor" while upholding the Romantic paradigm of childhood, their enthusiasm for professional child actors sat uneasily beside their enthusiasm for a Romantic lack of self-consciousness in children. In 1904, however, a child character appeared on the London stage²³³ with the power to resolve the cultural tension between celebrating the child on stage and rejecting the self-consciousness of performance as unchildlike. At once eminently theatrical and eminently unconscious, the figure of Peter Pan managed to embody that seeming impossibility—the utterly unselfconscious child on stage. The phenomenal popularity of

J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* in both England and the U.S., I contend, can in part be understood as a result of Peter's virtuoso combination of turn-of-the-century ideals of the child. Peter solves for audiences the puzzle of loving the unselfconscious child *and* the child on the stage, and he solves it by having no self. Without any stable sense of a self of which to be conscious, Peter exists suspended in a state of pure possibility. He is all that the anti-self-consciousness league could ask of a child: presocial, authentic, free, autonomous, boundless, and of course unselfconscious. But another wonderful consequence of lacking a defined self is that Peter can perfectly inhabit any role from moment to moment; he is the consummate child actor. And there he is, on stage, in all his paradox-resolving glory, available to be adored, but entirely unconcerned to procure our admiration.

Roger Lancelyn Green reports that Nina Boucicault, the first actress ever to play Peter, experienced some difficulty with comprehending the role she originated. Feeling "defeated by her part," Boucicault requested that Barrie please explain Peter—his essence, his being, his *self*. "What *is* Peter Pan?" Boucicault asked Barrie.²³⁴ Barrie replied, rather enigmatically, "Well, he was a bird a day old!" This non-definition of selfhood is a bit of playful nonsense that not only keeps open the possibilities of Peter's identity (Is he even human? Does he exist in time at all?) but moreover puts an unsolvable riddle in place of a self for Peter. In fact throughout the constellation of texts Barrie produced about Peter, the author stressed the mystery at the heart of the eternal boy, and hinted that the mystery only thinly concealed an absence. In a scenario that Barrie wrote for a proposed silent film of *Peter Pan* (sadly never made), he addresses the question that puzzled Boucicault and so many who encountered Peter: "*Who was Peter Pan? No one really knows. Perhaps he was just somebody's boy who was never was born.*"²³⁵ No one really knows who or what Peter is, including Barrie, and, more importantly, including Peter

himself. When asked who he is, Peter, like his creator, can answer only with a riddle about a “little bird” (*PP* 145).²³⁶ In the script for the film scenario, Barrie hints that Peter simply lacks a self when he facetiously suggests that Peter might be unborn, a nobody.

A boy without self, Peter is enabled to be supremely and, for his audience, satisfyingly unselfconscious. His lack of self-consciousness is such an important aspect of the character that Barrie required unconsciousness of the actors that play Peter, too. In Barrie’s notes “On the Acting of a Fairy Play,” which prefaced later versions of the script, he insists that all of the actors in *Peter Pan* should “never do anything because there is an audience, but only and entirely because you think this is how the character in the fanciful world would do it.”²³⁷ They are meant to appear unmindful of the audience, so that their performance in some ways is not performative at all but rather “spontaneous” and “artless.”²³⁸ The stage directions to the opening scene of the play note that “naturalness” must be “the aim of every one in the play”; the actors “must wear a child’s outlook on life as their only important adornment”—in other words, they must be unselfconscious (*PP* 88). But the appearance of unconsciousness was especially highly praised in actresses playing Peter. Green quotes Barrie biographer Denis Mackail as lauding the performance of Boucicault— “the Peter of all Peters”—for its seeming unconsciousness: both “unearthly” and “real,” Boucicault “had the touch of heart-breaking tragedy that is there in the story or fable from beginning to end; yet *she never seemed to know it*.”²³⁹ Boucicault was thirty-seven when she began her run as Peter, and yet managed to seem as unconscious as any Romantic child to at least some audience members to the degree that they could be persuaded to forget the artificiality of the stage and the fact that the person who stood before them was not a boy but in fact a grown woman.

Being eternal is an essential aspect of Peter's ability never to develop a self of which to be conscious, and thus never to exit the Romantic Eden of childhood and become a self-conscious performer. Anne Varty, who proposes that the shadow play in *Peter Pan* originates in part from the "Victorian fondness for domestic shadow theatre as an entertainment for children," points out also that outside of the theater, in the natural world, shadows come and go and change position in reference to the position of the sun, but "Peter Pan's shadow is independent of all these factors, a defiant assertion of his unique timekeeping."²⁴⁰ Perhaps one had rather say that Peter ignores time-keeping entirely, that for him as for Hamlet time is "out of joint." Barrie's play contrasts the clock-time of the nursery to the fluid, unstructured time of Peter's world, where the eternal boy does not keep time. The action of the play commences as the nursery's "cuckoo clock strikes six," at which sound Nana promptly performs her pre-bedtime ritual of turning down beds and such (*PP* 88). In quick if somewhat untidy succession, the audience witnesses the children's bedtime and bath time, and time for Michael's medicine, demonstrating the Darlings' reliance on clock-time to structure their daily activities. Peter, on the other hand, has no sense of time as a regularized constant that structures existence. When, in the novel, Wendy asks Peter his age, he replies, "I don't know, but quite young" (*PW* 99).

And no wonder he does not know, for living in Neverland does not provide one with many accurate ways to keep time; in Neverland "all the four seasons may pass while you are filling a jug at the well" (*PW* 106). The Darling children, embedded in time and thus history, are able to develop a sense of self and self-consciousness; Peter, loose in the fluid time of Neverland, cannot keep track of his own history and thus lives in a state of unconscious absorption in each present moment. As the novel version of the story elaborates, it is "quite impossible to say how time does wear on in the Neverland, where it is calculated by moons and suns, and there are ever

so many more of them than on the mainland” (PW 106). Of course, not everyone in Neverland escapes the confines of clock-time; Hook fears death in the jaws of a crocodile that has swallowed a clock. Smee notes to Hook that one day the clock the crocodile has swallowed will run down, “and then he’ll get you” (PW 106). The fear of time running down “haunts” Hook as it does not haunt the eternal boy, who need not ever fear time his time running out (PW 106). At the end of the play, a grown up Wendy explains Peter’s immortality to her daughter Jane in terms of time: “you see he had no sense of time. He thought all the past was just yesterday” (PP 159). Peter never notices when he has missed a year or many years of coming for Wendy.

The immortality of the time-oblivious Peter forms a striking contrast to the mortality of Wendy, who grows older as Peter forgets her for longer and longer stretches. *Peter and Wendy* famously opens with a declaration of the growing-up, and thus the mortality, of all children except Peter. The opening sentences of the novel tie growing up to knowledge. The passage seems to suggest that Wendy grows up because she knows she must:

One day when she was two years old she was playing in a garden, and she plucked another flower and ran with it to her mother. I suppose she must have looked rather delightful, for Mrs. Darling put her hand over her hart and cried, “Oh, why can’t you remain like this for ever!” That was all that passed between them on the subject, but henceforth Wendy knew that she must grow up. (PW 5)

As Paul Fox notes, the opening page of *Peter and Wendy* thus presents “a fall from innocence in a beautiful garden,” in which “a new consciousness of the self as a ‘subject’ aware of a future over which one is bereft of control” signals the beginning of the end of childhood.²⁴¹ As a tragic victim of the Romantic paradigm of childhood, Wendy finds herself being ushered out of Eden and into mortality the moment she becomes self-conscious. Peter, who never becomes self-

conscious, remains forever in his own little version of the paradise of childhood.

Peter cannot know himself, cannot become self-conscious, *because* he lives in a timeless state of continual forgetfulness, thinking “all the past was just yesterday” and failing to remember most of what happened in that capacious yesterday or even just moments ago. Without a sense of his own history, he lives unconsciously in each moment, and thus according to the tenets of Romantic childhood, but is also convinced he is the center of the universe, rather more like the stage-child in the spotlight. In the course of the Darlings’ journey from the nursery—of which Peter has only “an already fading recollection”—to Neverland, he forgets about John and Michael, and “soon maybe he will forget Wendy” (*PP* 115, 114). He can forget a solitary adventure “so completely” by the time he gets back to the home under the ground that he will not even mention it (*PP* 128). Only a year after Wendy’s first visit to Neverland, Peter already “sometimes forgets that she has been here before,” and he has entirely forgotten the lost boys, Hook and Tink, all of whom he knows only as features of Wendy’s stories about him (*PP* 153). Peter *thinks* he remembers a few things about his life—running away on the day of his birth, then trying to return and finding the window closed and his mother caring for a new boy—but the narrator of *Peter and Wendy* cautions us against trusting Peter’s memories: “He really knew nothing at all about it, he had merely suspicions” (*PW* 27). The novel’s narrator also tells us that this forgetfulness is the very quality that separates Peter from other children. As he describes the reaction of all children to the first act of unfairness perpetrated against them, the narrator notes that “no one ever gets over the first unfairness; no one except Peter. He often met it, but he always forgot it. I suppose that was the real difference between him and all the rest” (*PW* 82). Because he forgets everyone and everything, even his own history, from moment to moment the world confronts him shining and new, and he is at the center of it. What he cannot remember the

cause of he assumes he has accomplished himself, creating that fascinating and infuriating conceit that Wendy marvels at when Peter immediately forgets her fantastic sewing and believes he has re-attached his own shadow. He cannot remember a thing about himself, but from moment to moment he is the supreme being in his own world, and thus he combines vanity with unconsciousness.

Peter Pan is a boy without a sense of his own history, a boy with very little capacity for memory, little interiority, and no permanent sense of identity. His surrogate mothers, Wendy and Jane and their daughters, tell him “stories about himself, to which he listens eagerly” because he does not know his own story (*PW* 153). Reading Peter in the light of Carolyn Steedman’s work on childhood and adult interiority suggests that it is precisely because he lacks these things—memory, history, identity—that Peter never develops a stable self, and thus will never grow up. Steedman reminds us that according to Freud “the child develops an individual identity” when childhood, “as a cluster of desires, happenings, experiences, assaults and traumas, is relocated, put into another place”—the unconscious.²⁴² Thus Freud “discovered a particular meaning of childhood...its status as a form of history, and its import for the narration of time.”²⁴³ When the child tucks away the memory of the vicissitudes of childhood into the unconscious, he gains an identity, leaves childhood behind, and becomes an adult with the history of the child-that-was as the interior self. Peter, who remembers little, and thus has no history, cannot perform this act, and thus cannot begin the process of developing a self, which would lead to growing up.

Without memory, unable to tell himself his own life story and thus construct a stable identity, Peter has no sense of self, or at least no sense of a continuous history that would have accorded with nineteenth-century theories of selfhood. With little idea who or what he is, he can be both totally unselfconscious (like the ideal Romantic child) and full of possibilities for

performing innumerable roles (like the beloved precocious child actor). During the culminating one-on-one battle to the death aboard the pirate ship, Hook demands to know “who or what” Peter is, and even the “children listen eagerly for the answer,” but Peter—like Barrie responding to Boucicault’s query—offers only an enigmatic response: “I’m youth, I’m joy, I’m a little bird that has broken out of the egg” (*PP* 145). In the novel, the narrator swiftly undercuts any wish the reader may have to extrapolate on Peter’s identity based on this little riddle. Peter’s assertion, the narrator declares, is “nonsense” (*PW* 130). The truth is that Peter lacks a coherent, stable self, which gives him the astonishing ability to play the role of anyone with utter perfection. In Neverland battles, “he has a perplexing way of changing sides if he is winning too easily” (*PP* 123). Most of all, the play emphasizes his ability to act the role of Hook. In declaring himself more than once to be “captain” of the Lost Boys, Peter compares his role to that of Captain Hook (*PP* 101). Indeed, after vanquishing Hook and the other Pirates, Peter becomes captain of Hook’s ship, garbed in Hook’s dandy-ish clothes. Peter can “imitate the captain’s voice so perfectly,” Barrie observes in the stage directions, “that even the author has a dizzy feeling that at times he really was Hook” (*PP* 120). Certainly Hook’s pirates are bamboozled at the Mermaid’s Lagoon, as is Hook himself, who feels, as he listens to Peter announce himself in Hook’s voice, that “his ego is slipping from him” (*PP* 122). As the battle at the lagoon rages, Peter and Hook engage one another “strangely” not in the water but atop a rock that they simultaneously and independently scale to meet in the middle (*PP* 123). Here, though in so many ways alike, the two are differentiated. Peter fights fair; Hook does not.

Peter can be Hook at will, but, alas, Hook cannot be Peter, and therein lies the tragedy of this “not wholly unheroic figure” (*PP* 146). The text of the play tells us that the “something in Peter that at all times goads this extraordinary man to frenzy...is the boy’s cockiness, which

disturbs Hook like an insect” (*PP* 134). Peter’s infuriating “cockiness” is an amalgam of all of the qualities that make him both Romantic child and consummate actor: he has the boundlessness of the Romantic child, the unformed self which makes it possible for him to temporarily become anything he wishes; living outside of time and without memory, he is the center of his own perpetually self-renewing world; and above all, he is entirely unconscious. Karen Coats states that Peter lives in a constant state of *jouissance*, which is the pleasure of plenitude he achieves by living—like the ideal Romantic child—outside of time and social bonds. Furthermore, Coats points out that, on the other hand, “Hook is imprisoned by the past, by the linearity of time, thwarted in his inability to slough tradition and the expectations as to the form his life should take.”²⁴⁴ A former public school boy, Hook obsesses over good form, that most sacred of public school virtues. Hook knows that he himself frequently displays bad form, as he does atop the rock during the battle at Mermaid’s Lagoon, and hates Peter for his flawless good form. What especially torments Hook about his boy nemesis is that “Peter [does] not know in the least who or what he [is], which is the very pinnacle of good form” (*PW* 130).²⁴⁵ Peter entirely lacks a sense of self, a quality that Hook fetishizes and envies as “the pinnacle of good form.” Hook obsesses, like many a public schoolboy, about good form, or in other words unselfconsciousness, and thus Hook obsesses about Peter, but what makes things much worse for the pirate captain is that Peter is not equally absorbed in their rivalry. In the final moments of the battle aboard the pirate ship, Peter has “apparently forgotten the recent doings”: he sits atop a barrel, playing his flute as though there was not, just moments before, a battle to the death raging between him and Hook (*PP* 146). It is this fact that breaks Hook’s “great heart” and leads him to leap to his death in the belly of the crocodile (*PP* 146). It would break Hook’s heart all over again to know that Peter promptly forgets him after his demise.

Perhaps Hook would be comforted to know what we, the readers, are privy to: Peter's *jouissance* is ever so subtly imperfect. It bothers him that he forgets things; when Wendy attempts to excuse his forgetfulness on the grounds that he has had "so many adventures," Peter is "relieved" to hear her flattering explanation (*PP* 153). Peter has nightmares, about which the text of the play says merely that "in his dreams he is always in pursuit of a boy who was never here, nor anywhere: the only boy who could beat him" (*PP* 153). The presence of this uncannily superior boy in Peter's dreams seems to suggest that Peter fears that even he is circumscribed within his ostensible plenitude. The novel provides more detailed information about Peter's nightmares. In the middle of the book, as the action moves to a climax, Wendy and the lost boys have been kidnapped by the pirates, and only Peter Pan remains behind, unaware of the danger, in the home under the ground. Believing that the other children have set off to return to the Darling house, Peter falls asleep alone as Hook discovers a way to infiltrate the children's lair. The narrator chooses this moment of terrible suspense to provide the reader with a seemingly inconsequential side note about Peter: "Sometimes, though not often, he had dreams, and they were more painful than the dreams of other boys. For hours he could not be separated from these dreams, though he wailed piteously in them. They had to do, I think, with the riddle of his existence" (*PW* 110). Wendy, the narrator tells us, has often succored Peter as he suffers in the grips of this mysterious bad dream. However, Peter is not at this point in the book having one of those dreams. Instead, he has "fallen at once into a dreamless sleep," and thus Captain Hook finds him and notes his "open mouth, the drooping arm, the arched knee" (*PW* 111). In fact it is Peter's utter ease, his "impertinent appearance" while sleeping that "steel[s] Hook's heart" to kill the boy by poisoning his medicine (*PW* 111).

Why tell us about this dream, “more painful than the dreams of other boys,” at a time when Peter sleeps peacefully, even impertinently? The preoccupations of Captain Hook may help unravel the mystery. Peter’s lack of self and self-consciousness, marked here as impertinence, plagues both Hook and Peter. If the price of never growing up is never attaining an interior self, Peter does not pay that price entirely painlessly. Once in the course of *Peter and Wendy* we do observe him suffering this uniquely personal nightmare. After the defeat of Hook and the pirates, Peter prowls the decks of the pirate ship while the lost boys sleep, at last falling asleep himself beside Long Tom, the ship’s gun. In the last sentence of the chapter “Hook or Me This Time” the narrator remarks simply that Peter “had one of his dreams that night, and cried in his sleep for a long time, and Wendy held him tight” (*PW* 153). With the Darlings and the lost boys returning home, and Hook and the pirates vanquished, Peter has lost his provisional identities as “father” to the children and nemesis to Hook, and the “riddle of his existence” returns to haunt him.

The “riddle of his existence” might haunt Peter occasionally, but the audience embraces his difference from other children because it makes Peter the solution to a problem for them: it makes him a child both entirely unselfconscious *and* perfectly suited for performing. Being unlike other children has its benefits for Peter, too, such as fearlessness. Finding himself in the potentially fatal situation of near-drowning at the lagoon, for instance, Peter does not suffer from any anxieties; instead, he feels “just the one,” stands erect, smiles, and listens as his heart declares, “To die will be an awfully big adventure!” (*PW* 84). But the text of the play tells readers that at the moment when Peter makes his grandly fatalistic pronouncement, his heart is “a drum beating in his breast as if he were a real boy at last” (*PP* 125). Though he knows perfectly well that he could fly away and escape the rising tide at any moment, Peter relishes facing the

possibility of mortality because it makes him feel like a “real boy.” As we saw with Wendy, according to the logic of Peter’s universe, the “beginning of the end” for most children happens precisely at the dawning of self-consciousness. In this world of Barrie’s creation, to be self-conscious *is* to be mortal. The “riddle of his being” has, Peter intuits, something to do with his difference from other children, and if “he could get the hang of the thing”—of the riddle of his existence, that is—“his cry might become ‘To live would be an awfully big adventure!’” (*PP* 153-4). If he could solve the riddle of himself, and become self-conscious, he, like other children, would grow up and live a real life, a life embedded in the social, in time, and in mortality. However, he would no longer be the perfect solution to paradox of the audience’s simultaneous adoration of the Romantic child and fascination with the child actor. Never fear, though: Barrie assures us that Peter “can never quite get the hang of it, and so no one is as gay as he is” (*PP* 154). Peter maintains his joy, and the audience maintains its joy in him, but the cost is that Peter is not quite alive.

Peter is not quite a real boy; he might even be a dead boy. In his earliest incarnations in *The Little White Bird* and “Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens,” Peter, who has himself flown out of his nursery window—rather like a ghost—only to return and find it barred and his mother mourning his loss, watches over children who have been abandoned in the gardens overnight and are likely to die. He eagerly buries those who have died, happy to be no longer alone. By the time of the play and later the novel, Peter’s domain has been relocated from Kensington Gardens to Neverland, and his stewardship of the dead is no longer explicit, but he still reigns over a place outside of time to which children come after tumbling out of a window. But the children never do stay with him, no matter how tempted. The Darlings and the Lost Boys return to the comforts of home; Peter returns to Neverland alone.

Both of Peter's realms, Neverland and Kensington Gardens at night, are uncanny places, familiar and yet strange, a pairing that Freud points out provides the distinctive flavor of the *unheimlich*.²⁴⁶ An embodiment of both the Romantic ideal of unselfconscious childhood and the theatrical ideal of the child performer, Peter himself is quite uncanny in his combination of two seemingly antithetical paradigms. In fact, the stage directions leading up to Peter's entrance into the nursery explicitly call the intruder "uncanny" (*PP* 96). His presence is threatening and dark enough to put out the sweet, domestic, house-shaped night-lights that Mrs. Darling promised her children would watch over them just as faithfully as her own motherly eyes.²⁴⁷ Peter's uncanniness is signaled from his first semi-appearance in the play, for which he consists only of a disembodied "strange little face" and "a hand groping" at the window, spotted by Mrs. Darling (*PP* 89). Forgotten briefly during the cozy bustle of a bedtime routine, Peter emerges again into Mrs. Darling's consciousness as she prepares to depart for the evening. She warns her husband of the necessity of Nana's keeping watch in case Peter comes back for his shadow, shorn from his body by the swiftly closed nursery window a week ago. Mr. and Mrs. Darling contemplate Peter's shadow, a "flimsy thing" that yet "has human shape" (*PP* 93). That Peter's shadow can be severed from his body by something so mundane as a nursery window suggests that the boy is something extremely uncanny, something none-too-human despite its human shape. Peter's uncanniness could easily tip over into ghastliness, and yet instead it is the very thing that makes him so charming and delightful for audiences. He is uncanny because he has no defined self, and it is because he has no defined self that he can remain eternally unselfconscious even as he is eternally performing on stage for the pleasure of audiences.

Judith Plotz notes the uneasy "destitution" at the core of the Romantic child. She argues that the "triumphal lightness of being," the "mobility and emotional vagrancy" of Wordsworth's

child figures “is connected to an inner emptiness, destitution.”²⁴⁸ In finding an emptiness at the heart of the idealized child of the nineteenth century, Plotz corroborates the work of James Kincaid, who has persuasively demonstrated how, beginning in the nineteenth century, childhood “can be made a wonderfully hollow category,” and children themselves imagined as empty vessels to be filled with the projections and desires of adults.²⁴⁹ The empty child is a kind of attractive revenant, a beautiful cipher. Plotz links the emptiness of the idealized child to the category of the uncanny when she points out that the Romantic child’s “combination of lightness and loss is evident in the uncannily euphoric music makers” of Wordsworth’s poems, the “power and discomfort” of which “lies in the uncanny juxtaposition of seeming happiness and inner emptiness.”²⁵⁰ These uncanny music makers perhaps prefigure Peter Pan, who plays only fairy music on his pipes, “the only music he knows,” and whose playing gets more “riotous” as he defiantly declares “I just want always to be a little boy and have fun” (*PP* 133). There is something desperate about his music, and there is something terribly sad about the insubstantiality of him. Peter, as the lost boys know but never mention to him, has “no weight at all,” does not seem to need food, and cannot be touched, ghost-like (*PP* 124).

Through Peter, Barrie illustrates the problems of the Romantic paradigm of childhood, even while allowing the adult audience to revel in its pleasures. The unselfconscious Romantic child has no self to speak of, which means the continuance of an exciting state of possibility but also a severance from the social world, from the pleasure of relationships with other people founded on mutuality and responsibility to one another. Peter is saddened by the departure of the Lost Boys and the Darling children, suggesting that he (and the imagined figure of the Romantic child that he embodies) can be neither entirely self-sufficient nor permanently euphoric. Peter’s freedom from the limitations imposed by self-consciousness thrills the audience, but Barrie also

reminds them of what Peter loses by never growing up. As the Darling family rejoices in their reunion, the novel's narrator points out the pathetic sight of Peter "staring in at the window": "He had ecstasies innumerable that other children can never know, but he was looking through the window at the one joy from which he must forever be barred" (*PW* 141). To be part of a family is to have a social self, defined and delimited by the demands of others, and thus to grow up. Only by disavowing the pleasures of the real, social world—of life—can Peter remain a child forever. For the Victorians, self-consciousness may have figured as a terrible disease, one from which they imagined children to be blissfully free, but Barrie reminds us that desiring perfect unselfconsciousness in children is terribly akin to desiring their death.

5.0 A “DISQUIETING REFLECTION”: GOOD FORM AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOL BOY

Good form! However much he may have degenerated, he still knew that this is all that really matters. From far within him he heard a creaking as of rusty portals and through them came a stern tap-tap-tap, like hammering in the night when one cannot sleep. “Have you been in good form to-day?” was their eternal question.... Most disquieting reflection of all, was it not bad form to think about good form? His vitals were tortured by this problem. It was a claw within him sharper than the iron one.

---J.M. Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* (1911)²⁵¹

In order to illuminate the peculiar psyche of Captain Hook, the narrator of J. M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy* (1911) stresses the pirate captain’s “passion for good form,” announcing that—however much the former Etonian Hook may have “degenerated” from his public school days—he still knows that good form “is all that really matters” (117). What *is* good form? Why was it, as this chapter will demonstrate, so crucial to public school masculinity? Why is it so important to Hook, and why does it torment him so? This chapter will argue that the foundations of good form rest on a paradox, one best expressed by Captain Hook’s “disquieting reflection” as he ponders and envies Peter Pan’s perfect good form: Hook wonders, is it not “bad form to think about good form?” Good form signifies the consummate self-discipline of a gentleman, and yet it also calls for total unselfconsciousness. Hook’s “vitals were tortured by this problem. It was a claw within him sharper than the iron one” (117). Hook blames Peter for the loss of his hand,

which has been replaced by the iron claw, but Hook's deeper grievance against the eternal boy is that Peter's flawless *good* form relentlessly reminds Hook of his own *bad* form, and *thinking* about good form (or the lack thereof) guarantees that Hook will never *achieve* good form. For it is, indeed, bad form to think about good form.

The apotheosis of good form is having it but not knowing that you have it—like Peter Pan, who does “not know in the least who or what he was, which is the very pinnacle of good form” (130). Thus Hook cannot have it precisely because he gives it so much thought. Self-conscious consideration of one's relation to good form is the enemy of good form. One cannot be self-conscious and be in good form. But good form is also an accomplishment, something to achieve, something to strive toward as an aspiring gentleman. It is a public school boy's crowning laurel, and it demands both perfect behavior and perfect unselfconsciousness. Though good form was an ideal not only for public school boys—girls, women, and men all could and did strive for a version of it—the British public school was the site at which its demands were the most strenuous, and where, therefore, the incredible burden on the individual engendered by this paradoxical code of being and belonging can be most vividly witnessed. It is no accident, I suggest, that a system of self-regulation requiring paradoxical unselfconsciousness found its most intense expression in an institution for the education of middle-class children.

The concept of good form emerges in the late-Victorian period following a time during which the public schools were reformed to serve middle-class needs, and the masculine ideal aimed at by public school boys shifted from the profligate aristocratic male to the respectable, self-disciplined gentleman. As Edward Mack recounts in his history of British public schools, in 1861 Parliament appointed the Public School Commission in response to a widespread call for reform in Britain's nine premiere public schools, including Eton and Harrow.²⁵² In 1864 the

commission made their recommendations, many of which were implemented. This government intervention into the public schools—which until the 1860s had been almost entirely self-regulated—was unprecedented, and marked the future of the institution in two ways: first, the public schools, from this time on, gradually came to be thought of not merely as schools but as the forges of British character, producing and produced by an essential Britishness; second, the rolls of the public schools, formerly filled with the names of English aristocrats’ sons, began to swell with the less-illustrious but increasingly powerful names of the middle classes. The purpose of the public schools shifted from providing a space for barons’ sons to hobnob with their kind while getting a cursory education in ancient Greek, to turning out respectable middle-class British gentlemen. Reformists such as Sir John T. Coleridge ushered the public school into a new era in which the institution was intended to foster “that assemblage of qualities which, combined with integrity and goodness, constitute the accomplished gentleman.”²⁵³ And the code of the gentleman—always a mess of contradictions and anxious, vague, and shifting demands on character—was encapsulated in the tellingly unspecific phrase “good form.”²⁵⁴

The gentleman is largely a middle-class construction; the achievement of gentleman status, ironically, may have proven especially difficult for middle-class men. As James Fitzjames Stephen points out in an 1862 article in *Cornhill Magazine*, the definitive characteristic of the English gentleman is “plain, downright, frank simplicity,”²⁵⁵ and while simplicity (especially of speech) is, according to Stephen, native to both the upper and lower classes, the middle class lacks simplicity. Stephen offers as an example the commercial clerk, who “thinks about himself, and constantly tries to talk fine.”²⁵⁶ Thinking about himself, the clerk proves self-conscious rather than simple, and thus falls short of the demands of gentlemanliness. Anne Mozley’s 1861 *Blackwood’s* article “On Manners” likewise defines the gentleman as entirely unselfconscious; to

have “a good manner”—a phraseology that suggests an evolution towards the discourse of good form—is to “be one's self everywhere; everywhere at home—amongst ladies, amongst public men, amongst the learned, the fashionable, the idle, the precise; to be neither obtrusive, nor shy, nor uncomfortable; to be *right* without thinking of it, as a matter of course, because it is ourself.”²⁵⁷ Charles Kingsley described the great friend of his youth, Charles Mansfield, as the most perfect gentleman he had ever met, a man whose secret was the at once simple but not easily mastered art of “merely never thinking about himself,” a secret he “attained by not trying to attain it.”²⁵⁸ For middle-class Victorian men, to try consciously to achieve a good manner is to risk falling on the wrong side of a tricky performance of personality and be dismissed as an affected failure, a false gentleman.

In the discourse on the gentleman, defined and identifiable by his good form, self-conscious striving is repeatedly linked with failure, and success requires that one be “*right* without thinking of it.” And yet the popularity of books like Samuel Smiles²⁵⁹’s *Self-Help* (1859) demonstrates just how many British men *were* striving to reach the status of gentleman, even resorting to the self-conscious studying of lessons in a conduct manual to guide them in their endeavor. What an impossible situation they found themselves in, wherein to be seen to be trying is already to have failed. It is this masculine double-bind that James Eli Adams theorizes so deftly in *Dandies and Desert Saints*. As Adams articulates, Victorian masculinity implicated men in a paradox: the masculine man defines himself through a self-discipline that he opposes to the spectacle of femininity or aristocratic manhood, but he must also perform that self-discipline for the world, thus ultimately making a spectacle of his self-regulation. The paradox of good form overlaps with the paradox of Victorian masculinity as explored by Adams, but the two are not identical. For both good form and Victorian masculinity the peril of self-conscious theatricality

looms large. Good form, however, at least in its public school incarnation, incorporates an added layer of anxiety because it applies to children—specifically to boys, who, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, have been increasingly imagined to be naturally, simply unselfconscious. For a public school boy, then, to be self-conscious is to be triply in bad form: at once an effeminate milksop, an ungentlemanly cad, and an unnatural child.

In this chapter, I will trace some of the sources of public school good form in the literature consumed by the middle-class boys who swelled the ranks of the public schools. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the resurgence of the cult of chivalry and the growth of English nationalism meant that tales of ancient Britons such as King Arthur and Robin Hood, disseminated to boys in a myriad of publications, provided masculine models of gentlemanliness. As I will demonstrate, these models promoted unselfconsciousness as a masculine virtue; yet the very nostalgia for another age—and the very transformation of these figures of myth, oral narrative, and poetry into novelistic characters—suggests a deeply self-conscious undertaking on the behalf of authors. Furthermore, the call for boys to model their selfhood on these novelized lives of heroes while maintaining perfect unselfconsciousness constitutes a perhaps impossible psychic demand. I will explore a similar dynamic at work in public school novels, which seek to teach readers how to achieve good form while simultaneously seething with a self-conscious awareness that the very endeavor of teaching good form might be antithetical to good form. In examining a number of popular public school novels beginning with *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) and ending with *The Loom of Youth* (1917), I will show that the genre itself grows increasingly self-conscious as unselfconsciousness becomes an increasingly stringent demand made by the code of good form. Finally, I will explore the trope of the schoolboy burn-out in

order to determine how much this public school type is a victim and/or indictment of the demands of unselfconscious good form.

5.1 THE CULT OF CHIVALRY AND BOYS' LITERATURE

The nineteenth-century revival of chivalry exerted an enormous influence on constructions of the gentleman and the public schoolboy. In 1790 Edmund Burke had pronounced the age of chivalry dead, but even then, as Mark Girouard notes, chivalry's star was rising once more in British culture, Benjamin West having painted his portrait of Edward III and the Black Prince in 1788.²⁶⁰ Enlightenment interest in historical documents and artifacts had helped bring chivalry back into favor along with the Middle Ages. In addition, the French Revolution induced a measure of nostalgia for feudalism in English aristocrats, gentlemen, and clergy. Walter Scott updated chivalry for the nineteenth century by creating a fusion of the knightly virtues and middle-class ideals. His "Essay on Chivalry," first published in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* of 1818, traces a line of descent from the knight-errant of old to the modern gentleman, claiming that "from the wild and overstrained courtesies of Chivalry has been derived our present system of manners."²⁶¹

While Scott mixed praise for certain aspects of chivalry—courtly love, manly devotion to ideals—with censure for the excesses of its historical practitioners, Kenelm Digby registered a less qualified endorsement of chivalry for the modern world in *The Broad Stone of Honour, or, Rules for the Gentlemen of England* (1822). As the second half of his title suggests, Digby championed the study of chivalry for youths who wished to become gentlemen, and his odd volume, which mixes retellings of tales of chivalry from history and myth with Digby's own

impassioned dilations on knightliness, had a surprisingly wide audience for a work of such manic enthusiasm and perplexing eccentricity. *The Broad Stone of Honour* had a significant influence on the nineteenth-century cult of chivalry, and found some surprising devotees among writers of significant influence in their own right. For example, Girouard notes that William Wordsworth dedicated a poem to Digby²⁶², and John Ruskin wrote approvingly of him in *Modern Painters*, saying that it was from Digby that he “first learned to love nobleness.”²⁶³

Digby’s characterizations of chivalry contributed to the evolving notion that to be a gentleman one should be unselfconscious. He calls for “simplicity...imagination and innocence” over scrupulous intellectualism. This call evokes not only descriptions of the ideal gentleman but also prescriptions for proper childhood reading practices throughout much of the century, such as the edict pronounced by both Coleridge and Wordsworth that children read not realism but fantasy, guaranteed to take the child out of himself, thus preserving unselfconsciousness.²⁶⁴ Indeed Digby yokes together chivalry and childhood, claiming that, as long as the two survive, “imagination and piety shall not have spread their holy wings totally to fly the earth.”²⁶⁵ In contrast, Digby assures readers that “scrupulous anatomy of the mind” has a “direct tendency to the debasement of our nature.”²⁶⁶ Anatomizing of one’s mind will be considered antithetical to both chivalric gentlemanliness *and* childhood in the nineteenth century, and the good form of the schoolboy is the site where those constructs—both defined in opposition to self-consciousness and self-analysis—intersect. Digby articulates as much when he argues that the system of education under chivalry carries on in the system of boy-rule in public schools. Almost 100 years later, Henry Newbolt, the poet and public school enthusiast, echoes Digby when he proclaims that the “old method of training the young squires to knighthood produced our public school

system.”²⁶⁷ Newbolt’s expansive “our” makes the public schools national property, and the chivalric good form of schoolboys a national asset.

How did boys learn the values of chivalry? In part they learned from the nineteenth-century explosion of books published for children and featuring chivalric heroes. Knights filled the pages of children’s literature, with figures like the Black Prince and the Chevalier Bayard reinterpreted for the nursery library. Arthuriana, after having fallen out of favor under the sway of eighteenth-century rationalism, made a triumphant return to the British imaginary, representing for the Victorians and Edwardians a moral manliness that had much more to do with their own needs and tastes than with any possible historical Arthur—who would have been, if anything, a bloody conqueror.²⁶⁸ As Inga Bryden comments in *Reinventing King Arthur*, “the Arthurian type of manliness was above all that of the chivalric gentleman.”²⁶⁹ Likewise Robin Hood gained renewed popularity and got a makeover for a new century²⁷⁰; in place of the bawdy, violent trickster of an older tradition, nineteenth-century children’s books offer a gentlemanly, high-minded Robin Hood—usually identified as a dispossessed earl²⁷¹—fit to model masculinity to middle class boys.

As a testament to the importance of these heroes of chivalry as models for schoolboys, the frame story of Stephen Percy’s *Robin Hood and His Merry Foresters* (1841) sets the book up as a tale being told by a boy narrator to another boy (and, as the tale goes on, more and more boys who gather to listen), while they both sit under a sycamore outside their boarding school. The tale proceeds as the narrator recalls and recounts all that he knows of Robin Hood from his reading of ballads.²⁷² The first chapter is titled “Early School Days,” though the only “school” Robin attends is the greenwood school—Nature is his only tutor. Presumably, then, the school days referred to in the chapter title are those of the narrator, who is telling his tale at school. The

other chapter titles indicate which meeting of the teller and his listener this is (“Our Second Meeting”) with the exception of one that names a special occasion for the tale’s continuation determined by the school calendar (“Our Half-Holiday”). The tales of greenwood chivalry are thus closely tied to the world of school, drawing together the schoolboy and Robin Hood as his model. Percy’s *Robin Hood* initiates a tradition linking Robin Hood to the nineteenth-century schoolboy; Robin Hood becomes less a hero of the downtrodden and more a figure of boyhood character education.

George Manville Fenn’s *Young Robin Hood* (1899) envisions the benefits of Robin Hood’s example for boys by placing its boy protagonist—significantly also named Robin—directly under the tutelage of the knight of the greenwood.²⁷³ The book begins with Young Robin, the son of the Sherriff of Nottingham, being teased by his servant about his childish dependence on the protection of others as they ride through the bandit-ridden forest. The convoy indeed comes under attack by robbers—Robin Hood’s merry men—and in the fray Robin gets thrown from the horse. When he regains consciousness, the reader receives another clue that young Robin is in need of some reformation of character: Robin “could think of nothing but himself, his aching head, and his scratches, some of which were bleeding” (11). That self-absorption, along with his previous threats to report his servant’s insolence to his aunt, marks young Robin as something of a milksop, that tale-bearing, self-conscious, timid figure of schoolboy disdain. His position as milksop is only confirmed when he is humiliatingly robbed of his fine clothes by a swineherd.

Young Robin quickly falls in with Robin Hood, and the courteous outlaw immediately understands who the boy is and asks after his missing clothes. When Young Robin relates the swineherd’s theft, Robin Hood demands that the thief be punished, but also asks of Young

Robin: “Why did you let him [rob you]? Why didn’t you fight for your clothes like a man?” (22). Young Robin explains that the swineherd had the advantage of size, and Robin Hood concedes “that makes all the difference,” but the matter of Young Robin’s manliness has been raised nonetheless (22). The remainder of the book is devoted to his education into true, noble manliness under the care of Robin Hood and his men, an education that is imparted indirectly onto the presumed boy reader. At first both Maid Marian and Little John treat Young Robin like a baby: Marian feeds him milk and bread, the repast of the nursery, and Little John says Robin’s fingers are “like babies’ fingers” (28). But Little John assures Young Robin that a “lad who tries hard can do nearly anything,” and promises him that “when you can hit anything you shoot at you’ll be half a man” (47). Young Robin learns to fight with the quarterstaff too, and he’s a thorough enough forester and fighter halfway through the book that he manages to tame a fawn and thrash the swineherd who shamed him previously.

When the Sheriff locates his son and requests his return, Robin Hood sends word that the Sheriff must fetch the boy himself, setting the scene for Young Robin to prove his education has fully erased all traces of the milksop. Robin Hood’s men bring the Sheriff into the outlaw camp bound and blindfolded, and young Robin draws his dagger and demands to know who has dared to do this to his father. He frees his father, and the outlaws look on tenderly as father and son embrace. The Sheriff approves of his “bigger and stronger” son (69). When the boy says goodbye to his forest friends, he speaks “manfully,” his sojourn among outlaws having masculinized him (70). With Robin Hood as erstwhile father, the boy has made considerable strides towards gentlemanliness. Nineteenth-century tales of chivalry for children promised the same transformation from potential milksop to gentleman to their boy readers.

Though Robin and the other chivalric heroes of children's literature had their manners updated to those of the Victorian gentleman, nineteenth-century versions of their tales do not generally go so far as to transform the heroes into the psychologized protagonists of the nineteenth-century novel. In fact, Howard Pyle's immensely popular retellings of the King Arthur and Robin Hood legends describe heroes so without depth that they seem to have lived before self-consciousness was invented. In *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* (1883), Pyle's protagonist is as two-dimensional as his gorgeous illustrations, the prose devoid of the kinds of conventions the nineteenth-century perfected for creating a sense of interiority in narrative: interior monologue, free indirect discourse, and the like. Pyle gives little or no attention to Robin's motives, intentions, thoughts, feelings, or general mental life. His Robin, who inaugurates the popularity of the figure in America and secures the hero's move from penny weeklies to respectable children's literature, is simply a merry, completely unselfconscious medieval rambler.

The Robin Hoods of the most widely read nineteenth-century renderings are remarkable for being described as completely transparent, readily legible surfaces without interiority. Pierce Egan, whose version of the Robin Hood legend appeared in penny weekly parts from autumn 1839 to summer 1840, offers Robin as an "honest, open-hearted lad" who wears his heart on his doublet sleeve and whose hazel eyes convey a "clearness...which would tell the beholder the tenor of the thought passing in their possessor's mind ere his lips could give it utterance."²⁷⁴ Like Peter Pan, who does "not know in the least who or what he was, which is the very pinnacle of good form," Egan's Robin Hood declares merrily "I do not know who I am,"²⁷⁵ a cheerful avowal of unselfconsciousness that, by the terms of the Victorian code of the gentleman, proves his gentility. John Marsh's preface to his 1865 *The Life and Adventures of Robin Hood* makes a

point of remarking that “no attempt has been made to develop the character of the principal actors,” implying that a lack of development preserves the greatest virtues of Robin Hood and his merry men.²⁷⁶ In fact, by referring to them as “actors” rather than “characters” or “protagonists,” Marsh suggests that Robin Hood belongs more to the subjectivity-less world of pantomime theater than to the realm of the novel, with its demand for deep subjectivity in and subtle development of its characters. In their very two-dimensionality the chivalric heroes of nineteenth-century children’s literature exemplify the unselfconsciousness of the gentleman’s good form.

Yet these books seem to be extraordinarily self-conscious exercises in their nostalgic exhumation of these legendary lives, in their bringing up-to-date of medieval or pre-medieval characters to suit the moral tastes of the nineteenth century, and in their yearning for a simpler and more masculine past. The worth of Robin and Arthur as exemplary gentlemen depends on a self-conscious comparison of the perceived lack of satisfactory masculine models in the present with the yearned-for chivalry of the past. The entire endeavor of offering up unselfconscious heroes from the past, then, implicates the authors of these tales of chivalry for children in a counter-logic of self-consciousness. And what of the child readers? Do these tales not ask the reader to assess his own character, and the character of his age, in relation to what he reads? Can that process be anything but self-conscious? Is it likely that a child reader may strive to live up to the model of unselfconsciousness he reads about without being self-conscious about his progress (or lack thereof) toward the ideal? For a partial answer, we might look to Tom Sawyer. Though rooted in a European past, the cult of chivalry in the nineteenth century was a transatlantic phenomenon. In fact, many of the volumes of chivalric tales in the Victorian nursery would have been imports from America, including the immensely popular books of Howard Pyle. Tales of

Arthur and Robin Hood circulated widely among American children too, even before Pyle's remarkable volumes, which is why Mark Twain gives us Tom Sawyer and Joe Harper playing Robin Hood in the woods of St. Petersburg, Missouri. Like all of Tom's games, the Robin Hood game is dominated by Tom's literary knowledge; he insists that Joe do the dialogue in their play-acting "by the book."²⁷⁷ Tom's play is not spontaneous and unconscious (in other words, that is, up to the Romantic ideal), but rather supremely self-conscious, and it is so because he reads—and specifically, here, because he reads tales of chivalry, tales that promulgated a fully transatlantic craze by 1876.²⁷⁸

The spread of the Boy Scouts through both Britain and the United States further attests to the transatlanticism of the cult of chivalry. Robert Baden-Powell infused his organization with a curious combination of the American and the British. His *Scouting For Boys* (1908) teaches fundamentals of woodcraft and warcraft gleaned from American "Red Indians" and frontiersmen, but also assures boys that the first Scouts were the knights of old, and urges boys to fight, like St. George, against "everything evil and unclean": "In the old days the Knights were the real Scouts and their rules were very much like the Scout Law which we have now... You Scouts cannot do better than follow the example of the Knights."²⁷⁹ In a chapter devoted to the "Chivalry of the Knights," Baden-Powell's "Hints to Instructors" includes his urgent call to revive in the boys "some of the rules of the knights of old, which did so much for the moral tone of our race."²⁸⁰ Once again, the key to that chivalric moral tone is the self-discipline of the gentleman; the "Hints" that begin by invoking the rules of the knights ends by declaring that "Our effort is not so much to discipline the boys as to teach them to discipline themselves."²⁸¹ Part of that self-discipline involves Baden-Powell's maxim that boys be constantly vigilant and prepare for all contingencies. As Troy Boone observes, this "thorough self-regulation" aligns the

Scout with “middle class ‘character,” suggesting that chivalry, gentlemanliness, and Scouthood all require an intense self-consciousness.²⁸² And yet elsewhere in *Scouting* Baden-Powell recommends that the young Scouts perform “African” chants and dances, exercises he deems valuable precisely as a “corrective of self-consciousness.”²⁸³ The Scout, descended from the knight of old, must somehow be both self-disciplined and unselfconscious. This paradoxical demand structures both the code of chivalry and the code of Boy Scout—and the code of the public schoolboy.

Henry Newbolt called in 1917 for a “widening of the chivalric fellowship”²⁸⁴ to all classes, and praised Baden-Powell for bringing lower class boys into the Scouts, calling the institution a “school for Happy Warriors,”²⁸⁵ his phrase evoking William Wordsworth’s poem on the ideal man at arms. Unsurprisingly, the author of “Vitaï Lampada”—the poem that famously implored the schoolboy to “Play up! play up! and play the game!” on both the cricket field and the field of battle (as the former has its essence in preparation for the latter)—has even higher praise for the public schools. Newbolt declares that schoolboys have collectively kept alive the tradition of chivalry so that it might be imparted to new generations and new institutions like the Boy Scouts. In general the nineteenth century saw an increasingly strong tie between the public schools and chivalry in the British imagination. As Girouard notes, many of the prizes awarded at public schools were volumes of chivalric tales, and the decorations of the grounds and buildings often imaged chivalry.²⁸⁶ He also points out that Thomas Hughes’s *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857) repeatedly employs chivalric conventions. The first chapter of Book One begins with an illuminated letter that invokes St. George; it depicts a small boy (presumably Tom) dressed up as a knight, wrangling another child disguised as a dragon. The English countryside of Tom’s youth is layered in legends that connect it to St. George (and other English

heroes like Alfred the Great and Sir Walter Scott). According to Girouard, the many St. Georges depicted in public school chapels always seem to have the faces of public schoolboys.²⁸⁷ The schoolboy and the knight were so strongly linked that they shared a face. The code of chivalry demanded unselfconscious gentility, but the constant, self-consciously nostalgic appeals to the past that surrounded the schoolboy must have made it difficult to be knightly without thinking about being knightly—to be in good form.

And indeed, the public school story—from the mid-nineteenth-century *Tom Brown's Schooldays* to Alec Waugh's early-twentieth-century *The Loom of Youth* (1917)—traces an increasing concern about self-consciousness in schoolboys, as the genre itself grows more self-conscious about its aims and its possible failures. How can good form be learned *and* be unselfconscious? How can the literature of school life teach boys good form *without* making them think about good form (which is bad form)? Do not the myriad of rules that fall under the umbrella of good form—concerning dress, proper address, even where to walk and when to talk—require a constant self-regulation (like the constant vigilance of the Boy Scouts) that virtually precludes unselfconsciousness (which is the essence of good form)? One of the cleverest mobilizations of this paradox in the genre is writers' repeated use of a storyline in which a boy's good form is mistaken for bad form, and the plot culminates with his eventual, triumphant vindication—a paradigm that recalls the late-eighteenth-century warnings, discussed in Chapter One, that simplicity might be mistaken for affectation, and vice versa. The increasing centrality of this plot to school stories is one indicator of the genre's growing anxiety about the problem of good form, an anxiety that participates in a wider cultural quandary about its paradoxical nature.

5.2 THE SCHOOL STORY AND GOOD FORM

The phrase “good form” does not appear in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, but Tom’s first interaction with a Rugby boy consists of East, Tom’s future study mate, correcting Tom’s choice of headwear—“we never wear caps here”—and explaining that “a great deal depends on how a fellow cuts up at first. If he’s got nothing odd about him, and answers straightforward, and holds his head up, he gets on” (90, 91).²⁸⁸ The business about the hat involves a superficial brand of good form—abiding by the correct customs and manners—but the latter advice gets at the heart of the more philosophical nature of good form, which combines conventionality of thought, even conventionality of being, straightforwardness, and an easy unselfconsciousness about that conventionality. Tom is not entirely unselfconscious at his arrival, for he is “not a little anxious to show his friend that although a new boy he was no milksop” (97). A truly straightforward boy would unthinkingly demonstrate his lack of milksopery through naturally ideal behavior. Tom’s anxiety to prove he is not a milksop shows the gap between the ideal of good form and the measures that must be taken to appear to embody that ideal. Given that Tom is the protagonist, his anxiety and striving amount to an admission on the part of Hughes that good form must be sought. When he writes that one must “never try to be popular,” then, we should interpret him to mean that one must never *appear to* try to be popular (167-8). Total unselfconsciousness creates a boy like Diggs, a “queer fellow” who doesn’t display good form or bad form so much as a total lack of form, and is thus a sort of outcast who remains indifferent to the coolness with which the others treat him (175). In East’s terms, he’s got something odd about him.

Hughes’s novel, frequently cited as inaugurating the popularity of the school story genre, combines an earlier ethic requiring children to engage in pious self-reflection in order to attain

salvation (see Chapter One) with an emerging sense that a certain kind of self-consciousness is an unfortunate necessity in the pursuit of good form. That *Tom Brown's Schooldays* has been remembered by readers most often as an ideal portrait of straightforward, unselfconscious, natural boyhood indicates a perhaps willful misreading. In the later nineteenth century, and on into the twentieth, readers wanted a representation of the perfect good form of the schoolboy, and they made *Tom Brown's Schooldays* into that representation. But in truth rather than promoting the unthinking right-ness of good form that became the public school ideal later in the century, Hughes preaches that boys must leave behind the thoughtlessness that he, as an inheritor of some Romantic ideals of childhood, believes is natural to boyhood—boys “hate thinking,” the narrator declares (168)—and embrace the thoughtful contemplation of duty that Hughes learned as a primary virtue under Rugby's famous headmaster and reformer, Dr. Arnold.

Hughes acknowledges that the first entrance into self-conscious Arnoldian piety can be unpleasant: “For a short time after a boy has taken up such a life as Arnold would have urged upon him, he has a hard time of it. He finds his judgment often at fault, his body and intellect running away with him into all sorts of pitfalls, and himself coming down with a crash” (xliii). The boy here has fractured into a collection of parts—judgment, body, intellect—that are alienated from one another by self-conscious striving towards a new ideal. Though the Arnoldian boy at this point may get labeled a “prig” by outsiders, Hughes insists that he is “one of the humblest and truest and most childlike” of the criticizer's acquaintance (xliii). And in time, Hughes promises, “when the ‘thoughtful life’ has become habitual to him,” it will fit him “as easily as his skin” (xliii). The self-consciousness will have worked a new magic and reintegrated the body, mind, and soul of the Arnoldian boy. Though Tom begins his time at Rugby with “thoughtlessness enough to sink a three-decker” ship (143), Arnold will implant a new,

thoughtful nature in Tom, principally through the device of Arthur, the pious boy in need of protection. In the words of the narrator, Arthur teaches Tom “the value of having an object in his life, something that drew him out of himself” (236). The last sentence is curious, because in fact Arthur eventually leads Tom to a painful self-scrutiny, in which Tom must question and reject many behaviors that he had previously accepted in himself as natural, such as cribbing and antagonizing the masters. When Tom finally finds out that the Doctor set him up with Arthur in order to install “manliness and thoughtfulness” (365) in him, Tom becomes a full-blown hero-worshipper, “who would have satisfied the soul of Thomas Carlyle himself” (367). It is through this Carlylean hero-worship, Hughes believes, that a boy must come to “the worship of Him who is the King and Lord of heroes” (376). If anything it is his hero-worship of Arnold, not his friendship with Arthur, that draws Tom “out of himself.”

The novel, then, reflects a continuing belief in the value of self-reflection in children, but it also champions certain kinds of unselfconsciousness. The best and brightest of the village boys with whom Tom plays before his Rugby days is Harry Winburn, who is praised for his “bright unconsciousness” (59). Even the narrator seems to long for unselfconsciousness. Chapter Seven of Part One begins with a meditation on the joys of a half-waking state, “the dreamy delicious state in which one lies, half asleep, half awake, while consciousness begins to return” (135). These joys are, the narrator laments, never long-lasting: “the stupid, obtrusive, wakeful entity which we call ‘I,’” forces itself back to “take possession of us down to our very toes” (136). Self-consciousness here is a demonic presence violating not only the mind but also the body, which is inexorably filled to the toes with it. Unselfconsciousness, in contrast, carries with it a sort of religious grace. For example, Arthur’s parents succeed in their Christian mission precisely because they go about it so unselfconsciously: “They didn’t feel that they were doing anything

out of the common way, and so were perfectly natural, and had none of that condescension or consciousness of manner which so outrages the independent poor” (240). Likewise at school Arthur sets an example of piety for the other boys but does so “unconsciously to himself, and without the least attempt at proselytizing” (242). However, though Arthur might be unselfconscious about his influence over the other boys, he remains always more thoughtful than Tom, and thus “less of a boy” (351).

Tom Brown’s Schooldays was a transitional work between older and emerging views on childhood self-consciousness, and, though it clearly looks forward to the unselfconscious ideal of good form that would dominate the public schools later, it still urges boys to engage in the kind of deeply reflective self-conscious piety that would later seem antithetical to good form. Yet *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* was embraced by generations of readers because, despite Hughes’s earnest Arnold-inspired preaching, the author filled much of the book with fairly unreflective scenes of the corporal and corporeal hijinks of Tom and his more high-spirited friends. Indeed, reviewers would repeatedly refer to the healthy, vigorous, “unconscious” boyhood of Hughes’s novel as an antidote to the sickly self-consciousness of Frederic Farrar’s public school novel *Eric: or, Little by Little* (1858) despite the fact that one of the faults that Farrar sought to warn readers against was, in fact, excessive self-consciousness.

Even before he enters Roslyn School Eric’s problem is that he has “pride to a fault”: “he knew well that few of his fellows had gifts like his, either of mind or person, and his fair face often showed a clear impression of his own superiority.”²⁸⁹ The “clear impression of his own superiority” marks Eric as a particular public school type, the prig—“one who is conscious of his own excellence and satisfied with it,” as a 1906 article tracing the tradition of “School Tales” defines it.²⁹⁰ It is Eric’s self-conscious pride that opens him up to being “spoilt and ruined” as his

cousin and tutor Fanny fears school will make him.²⁹¹ Unlike Tom Brown, who literally dives into school life thoughtlessly by jumping into a football match, Eric on his first day awkwardly makes his way into a classroom and is “painfully conscious that all the boys were looking at him.”²⁹² Evidencing the fact that this initial moment of self-consciousness forebodes evil, the next time Eric is described as “painfully conscious” of the eyes of his schoolmates on him he is awaiting his sentence after having been caught drinking, an episode that very nearly leads to expulsion, the ultimate disgrace for a schoolboy.²⁹³ Though he escapes expulsion, Eric does fall into ruin and eventually an early death, a fall precipitated first and foremost by an excessive self-consciousness.

Given that such a dire warning against self-consciousness seems to be in line with the ever-increasing nineteenth-century endorsement of unselfconscious good form for public schoolboys, why have so many critics unfavorably compared *Eric* to Hughes’s tale, with all of its Arnoldian self-reflection? Edward Mack, like many before him, declares *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* to be “pervaded by the sunlight of happy, irresponsible boyhood”²⁹⁴; Farrar’s *Eric* and *St. Winifred’s, or, The World of School* (1862) strike him as “rather the nightmare emanation of some morbid, introverted brain.”²⁹⁵ The problem seems to be that Farrar, in writing about the dangers of self-consciousness, strikes his critics as introverted, as thinking too much about thinking, and, more perilously, encouraging child readers to think too much about thinking. Certainly the reviewer for the *Saturday Review* believed as much, and is worth quoting at length:

[S]uch a book as *Eric* appears to us eminently calculated to involve a nervous and conscientious lad in all sorts of useless and injurious speculations. Am I like Eric? Am I like Wildney? Am I like Owen? Am I like Montagu? Have I, by allowing an improper joke to pass without rebuke, ruined myself for time and eternity? Did

“the scale of” my “destiny hang on a single word?” And if so, did it go the wrong way? and if not, why not, and how otherwise? These speculations are most unhealthy. A boy—or a man either—may know and may think a great deal to much about himself....He is as likely to do right if he acts upon the simplest principle as if he had read a ton of novels about it; and he is rather more likely to feel the force of the principle if he is half-unconscious of its existence than if he has all the morbid anatomy of the sins produced by its neglect at his fingers’ end.²⁹⁶

Farrar, the reviewer declares, invites too much self-contemplation on the part of his child readers. The reviewer’s concern that the “lad” reading will compulsively compare himself to the child characters—either models of righteousness or models of sinfulness—recalls Coleridge’s warnings against children’s books about “Master Billy and Miss Ann,” which he deems “ridiculous and extremely hurtful” in their tendency to encourage self-conscious comparison on the part of child readers.²⁹⁷ Yet the reviewer does not condemn all novels about school as ruining the unconscious, simple rightness of the schoolboy; once again, *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* is praised as being full of “animal life and spirit.”²⁹⁸

As public school culture grew more and more averse to any evidence of self-consciousness in boys, and as reviewers of children’s books grew increasingly censorious of children’s books that might encourage self-consciousness in its child readers, authors of school stories had to attempt to represent and teach good form without appearing to think too much about it, or seeming to ask readers to think too much about it. Yet writers could hardly represent school life accurately without acknowledging the self-consciousness endemic to school culture. For the new boy, especially, entrance into school meant a constant awareness that there were a hopeless

number of arbitrary rules of good form specific to his school that no one would tell him about unless they were rebuking him for breaking them. And so school stories traditionally begin with bad form—Tom wearing the wrong hat—and the protagonist’s intense self-consciousness about his bad form: Peter, of *The Harrovians* (1913), grows “acutely self-conscious” when unsure where to walk on the street in relation to a few “bloods” strolling down the middle part of the street Harrow reserved for the most elevated schoolboys.

As if attempting to appease critics who found *Eric* too self-conscious, Farrar made Walter, the protagonist of *St. Winifred’s*, a complete natural at unselfconscious good form. Walter begins school a perfect boy of thirteen, “hardy, modest, truthful, unselfish, and obedient,” and emphatically not “some youthful prodig[y].”²⁹⁹ He is, as good form demands, popular without trying. When a dashing older boy, attractive but aloof and thus not as popular, asks Walter how he manages to make friends so easily, Walter answers, “I really don’t know; I never think about my own manner or anything else.”³⁰⁰ This specimen of natural good form, though, still did not satisfy many critics: the editors of *Every Boy’s Magazine* felt “bound to enter a protest against the general bearing of the book,” and the boys of Rudyard Kipling’s *Stalky & Co.* (1897) find it just as impossible to sell off an unwanted volume of *St. Winifred’s* as it is to unload an unwanted copy of *Eric*—both, tellingly, gifts from a maiden aunt. Perhaps the problem with Walter’s natural good form is that in its very perfection it invites boys to compare themselves, and their own self-conscious anxiety about good form, unfavorably to Walter’s ease. That critics object to both Eric and Walter—both excessive self-consciousness and perfect unselfconsciousness in the schoolboy—suggests that writers of school stories after Farrar did well to depict their protagonists as somewhere between abject failure and total perfection in the art of good form.

In fact, the preponderance of school stories seem to represent the public school as places that teach good form and then, more crucially, teach boys to hide the traces of its attainment. Arnold Lunn, in *The Harrovians*, acknowledges that existing in a constant state of public display and keeping up the demands of good form is exhausting for his boy protagonist, Peter, for it is difficult to “walk to your place in Hall with an affectation of unconsciousness, while acutely self-conscious, beneath the gaze of pitiless eyes” (236).³⁰¹ Yet the experience of achieving good form without seeming to try, Lunn avows, teaches a valuable lesson: “If [Peter] had been privately educated he would have grown up stupidly self-conscious, without the power to anticipate or the composure to survive a snub” (239). Instead, after leaving Harrow Peter “earned the reputation of being indifferent to dislike and proof against the most violent of snubs. That a boy naturally sensitive should achieve such a reputation is a startling tribute to the moral value of a Public School training” (239). Harrow teaches Peter to make being a gentleman *seem* natural to anyone on the outside. He leaves school with his mask perfected, the traces of his having ever been a sensitive, self-conscious boy hidden from observation by the outside world.

Yet if this is the purpose of the public school—to create a gentleman, a paragon of good form, and then erase the traces of his creation—the school story endangers this purpose by representing that process to outsiders. The purpose of the school story is to act as a preparation for, supplement to, or replacement of the public school, but it troublingly puts what should be hidden away on display for all, including potential outsiders. The public schoolboy is unmasked by the genre that reveres and hopes to re-create him endlessly. From the genre’s beginnings critics questioned whether school stories could represent the ideals of the public schools without betraying them. James Fitzjames Stephen, reviewing *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* in 1858, discerned the influence of Charles Kingsley’s doctrine of muscular Christianity, with its

“admiration of simplicity and unconsciousness,” but wondered whether it was possible to promote those qualities through the writing of novels in which the boy hero is “intended to display the excellence of a simple massive understanding united with the almost unconscious instinct to do good” when it seems likely that reading such an account is “calculated to produce an artistic admiration for simplicity and vigour, rather than simplicity and vigour themselves”?³⁰²

When reviews of Alec Waugh’s *The Loom of Youth* began appearing fifty years later in 1917, reviewers—now armed with a new, pseudo-psychological lexicon—were still warning that the school story’s open depiction of boyhood self-consciousness would harm readers, undermine the “development” of schoolboys, and bring unwanted scrutiny to the public schools by its exposure of what should remain hidden. Ex-headmaster of Eton Edward Lyttleton, reviewing Waugh’s controversial novel for *The Contemporary Review*, opines that while it is true that adolescence brings about the “sudden realisation of the self, the personality, the ego,” Nature demands a “rather dark veil” over this period of self-revelation, “as the dark processes of development go on most healthily if they are left to be secret and undisturbed.”³⁰³ By writing a novel with the intensely self-conscious boy Gordon at its center, Waugh has drawn aside the veil and endangered this dark process, usually protected by the walls of the school and the doctrine of good form, which forbids acknowledgement that self-knowledge even exists.

School story writers’ awareness of this conundrum—that writing about the public school perhaps inevitably imperils the veiled development of gentlemen—along with the paradoxical fact that representing good form may always be bad form, created a genre that was self-conscious about itself and its potential failures from its earliest instantiations, and only became more so as it grew in popularity. *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* displays its self-consciousness in its paratextual materials: its prefaces, which declare the novelist’s intentions and, later, clarify his

choices; its footnotes, particularly the famous one about the dangers of the “small friend system,” which appeals to the privileged knowledge shared by old Rugbeans³⁰⁴; and, finally, in its narrator’s frequent direct address of boy readers. Many school stories carried on the tradition of the self-conscious preface; in his preface to Talbot Baines Reed’s *The Fifth Form at St. Dominic’s* (1880), G. A. Hutchison self-consciously wards off criticisms that had been leveled at Farrar’s widely read and widely criticized school stories when he declares Reed’s boys “neither angels nor monstrosities,” and he promises that readers will find the book free of “affectation.”³⁰⁵ In other words, the preface self-consciously avers to the unselfconsciousness of the story. The dedicatory epistle of Lunn’s *The Harrovians* self-consciously attests to the book’s authenticity by noting that the story is based on Lunn’s own diaries, kept when he was a boy at Harrow. The authenticity of the story rests, then, on the self-conscious endeavor of journal-keeping.

Another testament to the deep-seated self-consciousness of the school story genre is the frequency with which the boy characters refer back to earlier school stories. The boys of *Stalky & Co.* disdain the works of Farrar; there’s nothing worse, in their view, than “beastly Erickin’.”³⁰⁶ John Verney, protagonist of Horace Annesley Vachell’s *The Hill* (1905) arrives at Harrow with a store of literary knowledge with which to compare his entrance into school: “John knew his *Tom Brown*.”³⁰⁷ Waugh’s *The Loom of Youth* has its young protagonist reading and responding passionately to another school story, Lunn’s *The Harrovians*, which is itself largely a send-up of the clichés of school life as depicted in school stories. The first pages of *The Harrovians* find young Peter imagining how his first day at school will surely go. He expects that some “half-hostile critics” will ask him about his father, to which “he would retort with a version of the traditional reply, ‘My father was a gentleman; what was yours?’” (7). The question

never materializes. The “traditional sequence of events” following his “traditional reply” should lead to him knocking out a “lout” and thus proving his good form, but poor Peter never gets the chance, and is baffled by what to do next (7). By 1913 schoolboy literature has made schoolboy life a series of self-conscious clichés, but Peter’s first moments do not follow the pattern, and he feels “not in the least like a hero of school fiction” as everyone ignores him (8). He resorts to displaying his own good form by remonstrating a foreign boy for his dress—fiction having taught him that English boys are inherently superior—and is surprised to find himself soundly beaten, with the approval of all the other English boys: “His favorite school stories were beginning to lose their charm” (11). After three terms of acting disastrously based on cliché, Peter comes to the conclusion that school stories are “rotten piffle” (15).

The genre’s self-consciousness about self-consciousness is made productive in Lunn’s loving satire. But a far more common way that school stories exploited the contradictions of self-consciousness was by mobilizing them as a plot structure. Tasked with representing good form without engendering self-consciousness about good form—which would be the pinnacle of bad form—school stories made their central dilemma into subject matter in the form of the “wrongly accused” plot, in which a boy’s good form is mistaken for bad form. This trope is a brilliant play on slippery nature of good form and the difficulties of representing it, but in its later instantiations it also enabled authors to mount a criticism of the possible failures of the public schools under the thrall of good form.

An early and fairly conventional example of the “wrongly accused” plot can be found in Reed’s 1880 school story *The Fifth Form at St. Dominic’s*. Originally published serially in the *Boy’s Own Paper*, the book is naturally episodic, and the “wrongly accused” plot constitutes only part of the story. In this segment of the story, Oliver of the fifth form finds his honor

questioned by the school when he refuses to return an unwarranted blow from a sixth form boy. His schoolmates' disdain for him only deepens when Oliver chooses not to respond to an insult directed at him by the same boy at the next day's cricket match. His refusal to do as the schoolboy code commands and answer these insults with a fight earns him a reputation as a coward. He seems to be in bad form. But in truth he has actually violated a lesser tenet of good form (fight for your honor) in order to observe a higher tenet of good form (control your temper). Good form also demands, unfortunately, that he cannot explain himself and defend his reputation. The first rule of good form is that you do not talk about good form. Oliver faces a dilemma analogous to that of the school story writer, who cannot write directly about good form without being in bad form. Oliver remains silent, and in disgrace, until his friends finally catch on and apologize for cutting him. The writer of school stories must also remain mostly silent about good form and hope that somehow his readers will catch on.

The "wrongly accused" plot is only one part of Reed's book; it is *the* plot of P. G. Wodehouse's 1907 tale of school life, *The White Feather*. In this case, a schoolboy called Sheen walks away from a scuffle between his fellows and a couple of townies and finds himself universally reviled as a result. In school parlance, he has shown the white feather. In order to win back his classmates' approval, he secretly learns to box and then wins a big competition for the school. Like Oliver, Sheen confronts suspicion about his motives; unlike Oliver, he is forced into bad form by the need to explain himself. He has to appeal to a boy named Drummond in order to get permission to fight on the school's behalf, explaining that he hopes to win honor for the school. Drummond feels that Sheen is "trying to 'do the boy hero'"; Drummond's thoughts on the matter underscore the self-consciousness of a genre that is always writing back to itself, but they also show that by 1907 it has grown nearly impossible to do the right thing without your

good form looking like self-consciousness or bad form:

In the school library, which had been stocked during the dark ages, when that type of story was popular, there were numerous school stories in which the hero retrieved a rocky reputation by thrashing the bully, displaying in the encounter an intuitive but overwhelming skill with his fists. Drummond could not help feeling that Sheen must have been reading one of these stories. It was all very fine and noble of him to want to show that he was No Coward After All, like Leo Cholmondeley or whatever his beastly name was, in *The Lads of St Ethelberta's* or some such piffling book; but, thought Drummond in his cold, practical way, what about the house?³⁰⁸

Because Wodehouse is writing a comedy, Sheen does indeed get a chance to recover his honor, but the very difficulty of his task—it takes him the entire book to succeed—evidences the growing burdens of the public school tradition of good form.

Those burdens become a matter of national importance in that, as Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy attests, the ideals of the public school, including the ideal of unselfconscious good form, became national ideals: he writes that "the ideals, ideas, taboos and standards of the public schools—that thin wafer of privilege—had become *national* ones, they had sunk deep into the unconscious of the nation. This was especially so by the years 1900-1914."³⁰⁹ The fact, then, that good form could so easily be mistaken for bad form was not just a problem for boys at school; as the ideals of school life migrated outside of school, this misinterpretation threatened adherents of good form anywhere. A. E. W. Mason's *The Four Feathers* (1902) issues a dark warning about the threats posed to the British Empire by the problems of good form.

In Mason's novel a young officer, Harry Feversham, abruptly and secretly resigns his

commission when he receives a telegram informing him that they will be called on to fight in the Mahdist War. As the novel makes clear, Feversham resigns not because he is afraid but because he fears he will be afraid. He acts in a manner that is perceived by others as cowardice, but paradoxically he does so for fear that he will prove a coward if he doesn't resign—a fear that has haunted him from his childhood, when his father told dinner party stories about men who proved cowards, and when the faces of his forefathers seemed to stare down at him from their portraits in the great hall, seeing the cowardice he imagined to be hidden within his heart: “All my life I have been afraid that some day I should play the coward.”³¹⁰ Even the word “play” suggests Feversham isn't a true coward, but merely taking on the role of one. Unfortunately three of Feversham's military friends discover his secret and send him three white feathers, to which his fiancé adds a fourth; Feversham spends the rest of the novel performing acts of suicidal courage in order to earn the right to return the feathers.

What Feversham's efforts to regain his reputation prove is that he is in fact an ideal soldier. He goes alone to Africa and performs the most dangerous missions, missions that no one else has been able to accomplish. And yet the Empire, represented by the senders of the feathers, rejected him. The book makes a powerful argument: imperial men are encouraged to embody an unselfconscious heroism, but the very best of those men are stricken by a self-conscious fear that they will not be able to perform. They cannot vocalize this fear—to do so would be humiliating—but they are rejected for it nonetheless. Yet that fear, that imaginative foresight, proves to make them the bravest of all once the action begins—as Feversham is once he throws himself in dangerous missions in Africa. Feversham “was a man who so shrank from the possibilities of battle, that he must actually send in his papers rather than confront them; yet when he stood in dire and immediate peril he felt no fear.”³¹¹ Feversham's best friend eventually

comes to see his disgrace as a great blessing, a gift of self-knowledge: “It’s his opportunity to know himself at last. Up to the moment of disgrace his life has all been sham and illusion; the man he believed himself to be, he never was, and now at last he knows it.”³¹² Knowing it, Feversham becomes the hero that he fears he is incapable of being. Mason argues that the Empire suffers when it cultivates the unconscious heroism which is merely an adult version of schoolboy good form, and which is ultimately “sham and illusion”; the greatest heroes, like Feversham, are heroic *because* of their self-knowledge. Mason’s plot, like his title, echoes that of Wodehouse’s *The White Feather*, but Mason reveals that the stakes are raised when the paradoxes of good form follow men out of school and threaten the empire.

Three years later, in 1905, novelist Reginald Turner issued a scathing denunciation of good form in *Longman’s Magazine*, arguing that it created “two national failings” among the middle classes: “suspicion” of all non-conformity in others, and “moral cowardice,” or the self-conscious fear of doing anything remarkable because it might bring on the bad opinions of others. An aesthete of Oscar Wilde’s circle, Turner’s critique of the middle-class cult of good form, and its detriment upon the nation, did not gain much approval or even notice in its time. But following World War I and its horrors, the tides of opinion turned against the public school-led cults of chivalry and good form, both of which were blamed for making British soldiers dull, idealistic, conformity-obsessed canon-fodder. The critiques of Mason and Turner begin to look prophetic in hindsight.

5.3 THE MYTH OF THE SCHOOLBOY BURNOUT

If these are the imagined stakes for Britain and its empire collectively, what are the stakes for the

individual exposed to the paradoxes of good form at school? Nineteenth-century educational discourse abounds with references to the phenomenon of the schoolboy burnout, who experiences a kind of moral-psychological breakdown under the intense pressures of gentlemanliness. This type of failed schoolboy is a figure not entirely coextensive with those doomed monsters of Victorian parental nightmare, the encephalitic prodigies of nineteenth-century lore—though the two types overlap. The type under consideration here is rather the sensitive, even nervous, boy who strives more for moral than academic perfection—though he can be a scholastic success too—and eventually experiences a sort of psychic collapse that leaves him incapable of fulfilling his childhood promise. Attempts to locate historical examples of this phenomenon, however, seem to offer up only a single concrete instance—that of Rugbean Arthur Clough. The schoolboy breakdown, it seems, is more a myth than a phenomenon—historian Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy calls it a “false archetype”³¹³—based on a single (shaky) case and bolstered otherwise by what seems to be a widespread sense that such a phenomenon *should* exist, that the public school *should* produce this alarming result.

In 1860 the *Quarterly Review* issued a review of recently published school stories; the same piece addressed a newly published lecture from Sir John T. Coleridge on the subject of public school reform. The article gives voice to a cultural concern that emerged as the public schools were reformed to educate the middle classes, a development which involved, at least in theory, a stronger emphasis on Christian morals and a more serious commitment to academic achievement for the boys. The reviewer warns that reformists must not increase the boys’ workload too much: “We dread over-cramming, and have a horror of prodigies.” The warning that over-cramming might backfire and make “idiots” out of the boys raises, unsurprisingly, the specter of the encephalitic prodigy, satirized in Kingsley’s *Water-babies* as turnip-heads, tragic

children whose minds have been so crammed with facts that their brains deliquesce.³¹⁴ But the reviewer also cautions reformists against creating “prigs”—a term that, as we have seen, indicates a moral-psychological flaw, an excessive self-consciousness. The myth of the schoolboy breakdown, it seems likely, is an extension of this distaste for prigs. A culture censorious of self-conscious children invented a monster, a prig grown so priggish as to collapse under the weight of his own self-conscious introspection. Often this boy monster is linked specifically to the tutelage of Dr. Arnold, the mid-century headmaster of Rugby who, largely due to Arthur P. Stanley’s hagiographic biography, was celebrated by many Victorians as the greatest of the public school reformers.³¹⁵

In the same review of *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* in which he questions the ability of school story writers to effectively represent Kingsleyan unselfconsciousness, James Fitzjames Stephen criticizes the effects that Arnold’s insistence on moral thoughtfulness had on the “imaginative sensitive boy of sixteen” the headmaster so often enthralled in Rugby’s sixth form.³¹⁶ It is, Stephen asserts, “most undesirable to be in the constant habit of referring every action to the great fundamental principles of right and wrong,” and this “very unwholesome” practice of constant moral thought is sure to “stimulate a diseased consciousness.”³¹⁷ In other words, the boy already inclined to priggish self-consciousness, finding himself under the influence of Dr. Arnold, is in danger of utter ruin. The *Times* review of Hughes’s novel likewise excoriates Arnold’s sixth form favorites, boys burdened with an “obtrusive self-consciousness.”³¹⁸ The *North British Review*, again reviewing *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, remarks that “a clever boy could scarcely be under [Arnold] without being stimulated to *think*—perhaps almost too much so.”³¹⁹ Lytton Strachey seized on this strain of criticism against Arnold—marginal though it had been during a nineteenth century that largely revered him—

when he eviscerated the former headmaster in *Eminent Victorians* (1918), and Strachey's critique likely authorized the twentieth-century re-evaluation of Arnold. Indeed, in his 1984 history of the public schools John Chandos continues the tradition of casting Arnold as a bad influence on boys when he argues that Arnold's sixth form elite "had been trained to be self-consciously and demonstratively righteous," and gained a "morbid scrupulosity sustained by probably inappropriate expectations."³²⁰

And what is Chandos's evidence of the ill effects of Arnold's influence? He cites the life of Arthur Hugh Clough, who was at Rugby under Arnold 1829-1837. Clough, as stated before, seems to be the sole case ever cited of this dangerous, Arnold-induced, disease of self-consciousness actually causing a schoolboy's ruin. When Edward Mack diagnoses Frederic Farrar as possessing a "morbid, introverted brain," he drives the point home by comparing the author to Clough.³²¹ By the time Mack was writing in 1938, Clough had become such a byword for the phenomenon under discussion that Mack could assume that not only would his readers know Clough—despite the fact that Clough was only ever a minor poet and certainly not a public figure of any stature—he could assume that they would know exactly the pathology that attached to that name. Clough had gained his reputation for spectacular failure shortly after his death, probably due to G. H. Lewes's 1862 *Cornhill Magazine* review of his posthumously published works that described Clough as "one of those prospectuses who never become works."³²² Lewes alludes to the "intense conviction" of Clough's friends "of some excellence which Clough *might* have achieved, *ought* to have achieved, but somehow *did not*."³²³ And why not? According to Lewes, the "bent of his mind seems to have inclined him to an almost morbid scrupulousness, and to speculation without end"—note the direct echo in Chandos's phrase "morbid scrupulosity" to describe Arnold's influence over 100 years later. This inclination toward self-

conscious speculation having come under the influence of Arnold meant that Clough never “recovered from the hotbed system of Rugby.”³²⁴ Strachey is most likely writing with Lewes’s estimation of Clough in mind when he calls out Clough as the most “conspicuous” example of a boy who fatally “fell completely under [Arnold’s] sway.”³²⁵ Clough’s 1962 biographer Katharine Chorley demonstrates the longevity of Lewes’s diagnosis when she titles her first chapter on Clough, which documents his youth, “The Problem.”

But other than the vague conviction of Clough’s friends that he should have done more, as cited by Lewes, what makes Clough the poster boy for public schoolboy burn-out? He left Rugby having won every prize possible, in good health, and seemingly stable enough, though Chorley notes that even in his boyhood his letters were sometimes “morbidly introspective.”³²⁶ He did endure two bouts of exhaustion while at Rugby: once after composing and reciting the poem that won him the English essay prize, and again after successfully completing the exam for the Balliol scholarship. But he made it to Oxford nonetheless. There he encountered the Tractarians; as he grew in sympathy with Cardinal Newman and his acolytes, Clough’s diary, according to another biographer, became “full of relentless self-examination.”³²⁷ Certainly all of this indicates an intense scholasticism and a self-conscious moral seriousness, but what of the ruin, the withering of potential, the infamous failure? There is one tale repeated more than any other as evidence of his having been irrevocably damaged by Rugby: after surprising his tutors by finishing his undergraduate exams with merely Second Class Honours, Clough walked from Oxford to Rugby to announce to his former headmaster that he had failed. It is a dramatic story, but it is not the end of Clough’s biography. He went on to travel, enjoy a happy marriage, have children, teach, lecture, serve as Florence Nightingale’s right hand man, and publish a number of poems before dying at age forty-two of malaria (not exactly a psychological disease). One

imagines he would have rather resented having this full life called a failed prospectus.

So the poster boy for this supposed phenomenon of the overburdened schoolboy mind, taxed with moral earnestness and self-conscious strain to the point of utter collapse, provides if anything a highly dissatisfactory case study. The poem for which Clough is best remembered, “Say Not the Struggle Naught Availeth” (1849), does not chronicle collapse but rather exhorts readers to continue their valiant moral struggles even when they cannot perceive any positive results—quite the opposite of a defeated exhaustion. The entire phenomenon of the schoolboy burnout looks to be a myth, and the question becomes one of how we explain the creation and sustainment of such a myth. It appears that Victorian culture had become so certain that self-consciousness would harm children that they imagined it had. The codes of public school life—whether that be the moral earnestness of Arnold’s Rugby, the “simple” unconsciousness of muscular Christianity, or the paradoxical strictures of good form—seemed so implicated in the problem of childhood self-consciousness that their ill effects, it seemed, *must* exist. So a mythical worst-case scenario was invented, and his specter hung over the public schools, and the literature they inspired, for more than a century.

5.4 MORBID SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND PUBLIC SCHOOL GHOSTS

If the schoolboy burnout was the figurative specter hanging over the public schools at the turn of the century, J. M. Barrie proposed that an actual ghost haunted Eton: Captain Hook. In a 1927 speech Barrie delivered at Eton, he claimed to have reports from reliable informants that for one night every year, after locking-out time (the hour at which the gates to the school grounds are locked for the night), the ghost of Hook haunts the grounds around Eton, unable to enter but

“gazing with peeled eyes through the darkness of his present to the innocence of his past.”³²⁸

Even in death Hook longs to return to his beloved public school, a place where, as Barrie reports the library records show, Hook obsessively read the works of the Lake poets, those proponents of unselfconscious childhood. Barrie’s supposed chief informant on these supernatural appearances, a Mr. G. F. T. Jasparin, is another old Etonian haunting (figuratively) his old school. Barrie deems Jasparin one of many Eton graduates “whom love for their old school has gently paralysed.” He lives in Windsor, which “lies under the shadow of Eton,” in rooms he has furnished “exactly like an Eton room,” socializes with other similarly paralyzed old boys, and is essentially a ghost, a boy who died upon graduating and refused to grow up—a schoolboy Peter Pan.³²⁹ The type is not a figment of Barrie’s imagination: Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) features another specimen of the species. Sebastian is another self-consciousness school boy, a grown up Christopher Robin still trailing his teddy bear at Oxford, ultimately destroyed because it turns out he cannot, Peter-Pan-like, merely refuse to grow up. In terms of contemporary pop psychology, this is the Peter Pan syndrome—the man who wants to remain a boy—and the syndrome seems to have most prominently struck the old boys of the public schools in the early twentieth century.

That well-known and highly regarded writers like Barrie and Waugh figured the public schools as producing abject failures hounded to their deaths by their obsession with their school days indicates the extent to which the schoolboy, failure, and death became entwined in the popular imagination. In a sense, the school story, chronicle of public school life, had always been about failure. The genre shares with the novel a tradition of using a social mistake and its consequences as the central narrative mechanism. As Kent Puckett’s *Bad Form: Social Mistakes and the Nineteenth Century Novel* so persuasively argues, bad form—the social mistake—

engenders identity-formation by, in his psychoanalytic terms evidencing the repression that fills the subconscious with all those self-creating bits of history that create subjectivity. In the novel, the mistake is the grounds for coherence in a character, and often the engine of the plot. As we have seen with the frequent use of the “wrongly accused” plot in the school story, this essentially novelistic genre revolves around a self-conscious consideration of social self-consciousness. It should not surprise us, then, that despite the incredible popularity of school stories in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, only one example—*Tom Brown’s Schooldays*—has secured anything close to a slot in the Golden Age canon.

Also contributing to the self-consciousness that marks the genre, many school stories were semi-autobiographical, written by old boys like Hook, reminiscing fondly about their school days. Hook, as far as we know, does not write his own memoirs, but he does dictate his autobiography to Smee on the occasion of his first appearance in the novel *Peter and Wendy*: “Hook heaved a heavy sigh, and I know not why it was, perhaps it was because of the soft beauty of the evening, but there came over him a desire to confide to his faithful bo’sun the story of his life. He spoke long and earnestly, but what it was all about Smee, who was rather stupid, did not know in the least” (53). The “story of his life,” as I argued in Chapter Three, is just what Peter can’t tell; that’s why Wendy has to tell it for him. Because Hook, unlike Peter, is self-conscious, he can produce an autobiography, just like all those diary-keeping children in Chapter One. The very crafting of an autobiographical story of school life—like Hook’s, like those of the old boys who published school stories—is a self-conscious endeavor, and therefore violates good form. It takes a “subtle mind” like Hook’s to construct a self-conscious narrative of one’s life (*Peter and Wendy* 104).

In contrast, Smee—of the lower classes and certainly no graduate of a public school—is

much less self-conscious than Hook, perhaps because he is “rather stupid.” He has no idea that the children love him, going cheerily on his way in the belief that he terrifies them. The narrator of *Peter and Wendy* describes him as “infinitely pathetic,” in part because he is “so pathetically unaware of it” (116). Perhaps it is because he is so “unconscious” that the children love him and not Hook (116). As Hook contemplates this question—“why do they find Smee lovable?”—a “terrible answer” comes to him: “‘Good form?’ Had the bo’sun good form without knowing it, which is the best form of all? [Hook] remembered that you have to prove you don’t know you have it before you are eligible for Pop” (118). With this remembrance of Hook’s, the narrator makes light of the terrible dilemma facing schoolboys held to a standard of good form that must be attained in order to join Pop, the highest rank in the school monitorial system, and the ultimate sign of boyhood achievement. Successful embodiment of good form must be proven, but to prove it is to acknowledge its existence, which is to violate the rules of good form. Boys are stuck in the unenviable position of having to prove that they have something but don’t know they have it. The very contemplation of this horrible paradox nearly drives Hook to strike his Smee down:

With a cry of rage he raised his iron hand over Smee’s head; but he did not tear.

What arrested him was this reflection: “To claw a man because he is good form, what would that be?” “Bad form!” The unhappy Hook was as impotent as he was damp, and he fell forward like a cut flower” (118).

Caught in his knowledge of the paradox that is good form, Hook is doubly emasculated: the narrator forthrightly declares him “impotent” and drives home the insult by comparing the dreaded pirate to a drooping flower, a metaphor of feminine nervous delicacy.

Hook’s effeminacy and impotence—evidenced in everything from his dandy-ish Cavalier

costume to the suggestively bent hook that replaces his hand after Peter symbolically castrates him—glances at a type of public school bad form that garnered particular cultural anxiety at the turn of the century: a brand of theatrical homosexuality. Good form is ultimately a performance, a consummate theatricality; it crafts a self poised perpetually between the virtuoso performance of unselfconsciousness, sincerity, and authenticity, and the very real possibility that the performance will fail under the pressure of its own haunting self-reflexiveness. If it fails, the result is what was widely called “morbid” self-consciousness, a sort of new psychopathologic designation of neurotic self-involvement, a turning in of the self that, as the term “morbid” implies, is linked to disease and death. On the one hand, the explicit morbidity is mental: an excessive self-consciousness leads to isolation, mental disease, withdrawal from life. But on the other hand, the inward-turning nature of “morbid self-consciousness” suggests that the disease may extend to the physical, may escalate into the sexual “disorder” beginning to be known, in Hook’s time, as inversion.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century homosexual activity in the public schools had periodically become a site of great cultural anxiety, and with as the outrage against Alec Waugh’s frankly homoerotic *The Loom of Youth* indicates, the turn of the century was certainly one period of heightened anxiety. Here it is instructive to recall Miles of Henry James’s ghost story and/or psychological thriller, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). Expelled from public school for an unspoken (or unspeakable?) reason, the attractive and well-mannered boy returns home to torment his governess by possibly having congress (of what sort?) with the ghost of Peter Quint. In her mounting distress over the boy—Was he sent home for engaging in homosexual activities? Does he continue to indulge those habits with the ghost of a grown man?—the governess eventually kills Miles. The only way to exorcise the specter of schoolboy homosexuality, in this

tale, is through the death of the schoolboy. Hook too elects to end his own torment with his death, though if we consider Barrie's speech the poor pirate continues to be tormented by the memory of his school days even in death.

It is Peter's flawless good form that finally tips Hook towards his death. In their final battle aboard the ship, Hook seems to be winning but loses the advantage the moment he notes "a tragic feeling that Peter was showing good form" (130). In response to Hook's tortured question, "Pan, who and what art thou?" Peter gives a nonsensical answer—"I'm youth, I'm joy...I'm a little bird that has broken out of the egg"—and the riddle is "proof to the unhappy Hook that Peter did not know in the least who or what he was, which is the very pinnacle of good form" (130). Hook's only triumph before dying is an awareness that in his last moments he is "true to the traditions of his race," in that he is thinking not of the battle with Peter but of the playing fields of Eton, and his "shoes were right, and his waistcoat was right, and his tie was right, and his socks were right" (131-2). To top off this sartorial rectitude, Hook finally manages to trick Peter into showing bad form by kicking when he should stab, and the pirate's dying words as he launches himself into the jaws of the crocodile are "Bad form" (132). Hook, alas, only fools himself, for we already know that good form goes much deeper than appropriate clothes, and, furthermore, we know that it is bad form to think about form at all—one's own or another's.

Even in his dying moments Hook evinces the preoccupation with dress that is one aspect of schoolboy good form. Hook wears not an Eton suit but rather a version of a Cavalier costume, like the one famously worn by Oscar Wilde on his 1882 American tour. By 1904, post-Wilde-trials, the costume would certainly have been pretty well irreversibly associated with homosexuality, but long before the trials Frances Hodgson Burnett, friend of Wilde, had made it the costume of her child protagonist Little Lord Fauntleroy in 1886. The early twentieth century

saw a retroactive pathologization of the costume, which apparently had been imposed on many children by mothers besotted with Burnett's little hero.³³⁰ The stringent reprisals against the trend carried undertones of what we would now call gay panic: the "million fond mamas" who imposed the Little Lord Fauntleroy suit on their boys were accused of setting up their "army of little lords" for beatings from "that other taunting army of Huck Finns," the natural response of the rough-and-tumble manly American boy being to dole out a sound thrashing when faced with golden curls and lace.³³¹ Interestingly, at the same time, Thomas Gainsborough's portrait the *Blue Boy*, also dressed in Cavalier costume, was the most famous painting in the world.³³² The *Blue Boy* enjoyed such popularity in part because, as Anne Higonnet deftly demonstrates in *Pictures of Innocence*, it provided a potent symbol of Romantic childhood as detached from time, as the boy, painted in 1770 wore the clothes of a seventeenth-century aristocrat. He borrowed his costume from masquerade tradition of copying the fancy dress seen in portraits of an earlier era; the *Blue Boy* took his sartorial cues from Van Dyke's 1635 portrait of a very self-conscious aristocratic boy.

To follow the trail in reverse: in 1635 Van Dyke paints a young and very knowing George Villiers in the costume that indicates his eventual aristocratic adult masculinity; in the eighteenth century, masqueraders seize on this style of dress, the Cavalier costume, as one of a handful of "genres" of masquerade costume; in 1770 Gainsborough paints the *Blue Boy* in a version of the Cavalier costume, in the process creating an image that becomes famous for its representation of timeless Romantic childhood; in 1882 Oscar Wilde, famous for his self-conscious performativity, praises the Cavalier costume as the epitome of masculine attire and adopts it for his American tour; in 1886, most likely inspired by her friend Wilde, Frances Hodgson Burnett dresses Little Lord Fauntleroy (and her own sons) in just such a costume,³³³

inspiring other mothers to dress their sons in copies of the costume; in 1895, in a series of highly publicized trials, Wilde is convicted of, in essence, homosexuality; in 1904, *Peter Pan* debuts, with the villainous, effeminate, good-form-obsessed old Etonian Captain Hook dressed conspicuously in Cavalier costume; and finally, in the first decades of the twentieth century, the Little Lord Fauntleroy costume—indelibly marked by its association both with Wilde and with the “old-fashioned,” self-conscious protagonist of Burnett’s now-out-of-favor book and play—is retrospectively converted into an instrument of boy-torture or a machine for producing effeminate milksops that was “fastened upon thousands of helpless small boys” in the wake of the book and play’s popularity.³³⁴ The singular example of the Cavalier costume is meant to convey a few points. First, it traces a history of childhood that accords with the claims this book: the same costume means first the child’s value as a future adult, then the radical malleability of identity in the masquerade, then the prelapsarian identity of Romantic childhood, and at last the pathological identity of the morbidly self-conscious and possibly homosexual child, thus emblemizing the beginnings of the association between psychopathology, homosexuality, and self-consciousness. Finally, the history of the Cavalier costume in representations of childhood highlights the ways that the child’s embeddedness in or (imagined) freedom from social self-consciousness can be encoded in dress, which was of course one aspect of the rules of good form. This last observation may seem rather trivial but it illuminates a final aspect of *Peter Pan*, who in so many ways brings forward everything this book wants to note about the consequences of the nineteenth century’s preoccupation with childhood self-consciousness.

The schoolboy code of good form required scrupulous attention to dress (the right hat, the right shoes, the right tie), imposed bizarre rules about general comportment (where to walk, who to talk to), and above all demanded that one be right without ever seeming to try. The complexity

of the codes could not help but produce endless mistakes and/or self-conscious, “morbid” anxiety. Peter Pan escapes the pressure of sartorial rules by being nearly naked, but his nakedness is ultimately just another sign of his severance from life. By the Edwardian era, the cultural preoccupation with childhood self-consciousness has created two poles: the morbidly self-conscious schoolboy, who Barrie gives us in the form of Hook (who jumps to his death, who is the Eton ghost, who can be seen by the other old boys who are figurative ghosts), and the perfectly unselfconscious and probably perfectly dead Peter Pan. Hook’s inability to return to his Etonian childhood—his ghost is always trapped outside the grounds of Eton *after* locking-out time—parallels Peter’s inability to re-enter his childhood bedroom once his own fatal “locking-out time” has gone into effect.³³⁵ Self-consciousness—having it, not having it—has become such a burden on childhood by the early twentieth century that Barrie envisions death as the outcome either way. It’s dead if you do and dead if you don’t.

6.0 EPILOGUE

“[R]emember the wise saying that there are more things in heaven
and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy.”
-Sigmund Freud, “An Infantile Neurosis” (1918)³³⁶

In quoting Hamlet when describing the astonishing findings of his psychoanalytic practice, Freud suggests that the patient who has experienced these extraordinary and incredible details of neurotic development is the self-conscious, disturbed Hamlet, assuring Freud-as-Horatio that the world is indeed strange, and leaving it to Horatio-Freud to communicate the story to us, the wider audience. Freud’s phrase forges strong links between Hamlet, the self-conscious mind, and the subject of psychoanalysis. However, Freud’s remarks on the unsuitability of children as subjects of psychoanalysis reaffirm the nineteenth-century sense, present as early as Charles Lamb’s version of *Hamlet*, that the Hamlet-condition—self-conscious reflection—is incompatible with childhood.

Yet Freud also makes the unselfconsciousness of childhood the necessary prerequisite of adult-centered psychoanalysis. We might, then, reconsider Freud’s quotation of *Hamlet*. Perhaps Freud himself is the Hamlet with knowledge of those undreamt-of things, and we his readers are Horatio, carrying his legacy forward even after his work has ended. This second interpretation reminds us how much those ideas about childhood and self-consciousness have been carried forward into the contemporary culture by the wide diffusion of Freudian paradigms of the mind.

In this epilogue, I will briefly consider the implications of some versions of Freudian ideas on childhood that have gained significant traction in the popular imagination.

As has been well documented, Freudian psychoanalysis did not fabricate an entirely new theory of selfhood at the beginning of the twentieth century; rather, it integrated into a particularly persuasive and durable form many theories and discourses of selfhood that had been supplementing and reinforcing each other since the eighteenth century at least, many of which have been considered in the course of the present study. Likewise, when Freud theorized the formation of the self in childhood, he drew on ideas disseminated in the nineteenth century. To cite one well-established example, the architecture of the psychosexual stages of childhood grows out of recapitulation theory. As Carolyn Steedman puts it, Freudian psychoanalysis was not so much inventing a new theory of identity formation in childhood as “summarizing and reformulating a great many nineteenth-century articulations of the idea that the core of an individual’s psychic identity was his or her own lost past, or childhood.”³³⁷

Other widely circulating beliefs about childhood contributed to Freud’s theories. Crucially, the accepted notion that childhood existed outside of culture underwrites Freud’s entire project of basing identity in personal libidinal conflicts, rather than in wider cultural and social relations. For example, his analysis of the Wolf Man case makes it clear that other physicians, critical of Freud’s analysis, located the origins of adult neuroses not in libidinal forces but in cultural forces—anxieties about social standing, work pressures, and so on. Freud uses the child’s ostensible position outside of culture to counter these claims:

The study of children’s neuroses exposed the complete inadequacy of these shallow or high-handed attempts at re-interpretation. It shows the predominant part that is played in the formation of neuroses by those libidinal motive forces

which are so eagerly disavowed, and reveals the absence of any aspirations towards remote cultural aims, of which the child still knows nothing, and which cannot therefore be of any significance for him.³³⁸

By tracing the source of all neuroses to childhood, which the nineteenth century consensus locates childhood outside of culture, Freud makes the development of the psyche a matter of individual dramas of desire.

If the child's ostensible location outside culture underpins Freud's theory of the roots of psychopathology, another truism about the nature of childhood forms the essential foundation of psychoanalytic practice and confirms Freud's architecture of the self: the axiomatic unselfconsciousness of childhood. As is clear in Freud's account of the Wolf Man case, adult analysis assumes, even *requires*, unselfconscious childhood. Nearly all of the material for analysis in the Wolf Man's case consists of recollections of childhood events and fantasies of which the patient, Freud insists, could not have been fully conscious at the time they originally occurred. The lack of self-consciousness endemic to childhood, Freud explains, makes the analysis of children much less fruitful than the analysis of adults who recollect, however wrongly, a childhood that went unanalyzed at the time:

An analysis which is conducted upon a neurotic child itself must, as a matter of course, appear to be more trustworthy, but it cannot be very rich in materials; too many words and thoughts have to be lent to the child, and even so the deepest strata may turn out to be impenetrable to consciousness. An analysis of a childhood disorder through the medium of recollection in an intellectually mature adult is free from these limitations; but it necessitates our taking into account the distortion and refurbishing to which a person's own past is subjected when it is

looked back upon from a later period. The first alternative perhaps gives the more convincing results; the second is by far the more instructive. (8-9)

The child's understanding of his own experiences, and his ability to relate those experiences to the analyst, come up against two limits, Freud believes, inherent to childhood: the linguistic limit—simply not having the necessary vocabulary to communicate complex feelings and events—and the mental limit—not having the self-reflective ability to form conscious thoughts about oneself. So that despite—even *because of*—the distortions adult memory places on childhood occurrences, the self-conscious recollections of the adult are more instructive in understanding the neuroses of the now-vanished child. In the case of the Wolf Man, the events and fantasies brought forth for analysis by the twenty-five-year old patient originated between ages one and four; however, “only twenty years later, during the analysis, is he able to grasp with his conscious mental processes what was then going on in him” (45 n.1).

Only one of Freud's case histories involves a child patient, and even in the case of five-year-old neurotic Little Hans, Freud depends upon Hans's father to stand in as a sort of auxiliary self-consciousness. Necessarily, Freud points out, analysis is an act of collaborative interpretation carried out by two *adults*. When the patient is an adult, the patient and the analyst form the interpretive team. But when the patient is a child, assumed to be unselfconscious and thus incapable of self-interpretation, the analyst teams up with the parent, as in the Hans case. Clearly Freud sees the success of this case as an outlier, however, enabled by Hans's father's long association with Freud and intimate knowledge of his theories. Freud, for the most part, sees psychoanalysis as incompatible with child patients, making him a typical late-Victorian. Strikingly, when Freud again met Hans as a nineteen-year-old, Hans related that he remembered nothing of his early phobias and analysis, and read his own case history “as something

unknown.”³³⁹ Freud seems to offer this “amnesia” as proof, against those who condemned the project of subjecting a small child to psycho-analysis, that it had been harmless. (In fact he implies that Hans’s good mental and physical health as a young man may be the positive result of early analysis.) But it should be noted that the process of analysis, which Freud claims is normally (for adults) intended to bring repressed material out of the unconscious into the conscious mind where it can be self-consciously confronted and reconciled, when practiced on a child, results in Hans’s complete unawareness of his own history. And Freud approves. Childhood is, for psychoanalysis, the “prehistoric period,” a time before the individual’s history began, because a history must be self-consciously constructed, and the child lacks self-consciousness (“Infantile Neurosis”18).

The structure of selfhood, and the process of psychoanalysis, articulated by Freud requires childhood to be the lost—but recoverable through analysis—prehistory of the self. In an adult patient the analyst goes through a process of “uncovering the psychical formations, layer by layer,” which eventually lays bare the “patient’s infantile sexuality” and thus exposes the “motive forces of all the neurotic symptoms of later life.”³⁴⁰ Here we have the adult self as an accretion of layers, a set of nesting dolls, at the center of which is the child. The notion that identity formation is a process located in childhood but only available to consciousness in adulthood has filtered into the popular imagination so thoroughly that one need not have read Freud to employ his formulation as a working theory of selfhood. Freudian psychoanalysis so dominated the practice of psychology in the twentieth century that even someone who has never experienced analysis or read *The Interpretation of Dreams* will have encountered countless scenes in novels, television, cartoons, etc., in which the patient lies down on the couch and the doctor intones “Tell me about your childhood...”

Around 1910 Freud fully developed the centerpiece of his theories: the Oedipal crisis, the unconscious process of childhood desire and repression that creates identity. As is clear in his joint reading of *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet* in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud named the Oedipus complex after Sophocles's hero because he saw in the Greek tragedy an astonishingly in-the-open working out of what he believed to be a universal human experience.³⁴¹ But he also believed that the Greeks were able to acknowledge these desires so openly only because they were still creating modern civilization. Once civilization settled in, as it were, humans could no longer give such bare expression to the formation of subjectivity through desire and repression. For Freud, this is exactly why Hamlet can never confront the fact that his entire problem is Oedipal. In Freud's reading of the play, Hamlet hesitates to kill his uncle precisely because Claudius has done what Hamlet, in the Oedipal stage, dreamed of doing: kill Hamlet's father and marry his mother. For Hamlet to kill Claudius would be to confront his own repressed desires. Neither Hamlet, nor the play, nor the audience, can acknowledge this truth, so we all dance around it together, and Freud declares that it is left to him to "unearth" the fact that *Hamlet* "has its roots in the same soil as *Oedipus Rex*."³⁴²

Another important difference between Sophocles's hero and Shakespeare's is that while Oedipus solves the Sphinx's riddle—a riddle about the mysterious metamorphoses of the human lifespan, about life and growth and death—Hamlet merely dithers over his own riddle about existence: "To be or not to be." In linking both of these adult characters, and their riddles, to the formation of the self in childhood, Freud brings us back to Peter Pan, a boy plagued by the "riddle of his existence." Remember that the narrator of *Peter and Wendy* tells us that if Peter—who is arguably a dead child, a kind of glorious ghost—could solve the riddle of himself, he would realize that the ultimate adventure is to live, instead of to die. By conceiving of and

representing childhood as unselfconscious, we imagine children as riddles, ghosts even. It is this sense of the child self as a riddle to solve, as a ghost that haunts, that gave psychoanalysis its aim. The adult patient makes contact with the ghost, solves the riddle, and is healed. To live becomes a great adventure.

NOTES

¹ Sherwood, *History of the Fairchild Family*, 68.

² Dowson, "The Cult of the Child," 22.

³ This heavenly child is the Victorian distillation of Wordsworth; Judith Plotz makes a convincing argument that the vision of childhood one actually finds in Wordsworth's work is much more complex, and not nearly so angelic. Plotz, *Romantic Vocation of Childhood*.

⁴ In her piece "A Century of Children's Books" for the *National Review*, Evaline Godley calls Mr. Fairchild's corpse-viewing outing "grotesquely shocking to modern ideas, while L. B. Lang deems the same scene a "ghastly episode" and wonders that "any man should voluntarily have exposed children to such an ordeal"; Godley, "Century of Children's Books," 96; Lang, "The Fairchild Family," 466, 467.

⁵ Lang, "The Fairchild Family and Their Creator," 465. The article is attributed to "L. B. Lang," who is presumably Leonora Blanche Lang, author of children's books and wife of fairy-tale collector Andrew Lang.

⁶ "Children's Literature," 326.

⁷ For the apparent origin of this designation, see Green, "The Golden Age of Children's Books."

⁸ See for example: Field, *The Child and His Book*; White, "Children's Books and Their Illustrators."

⁹ Field, *Child and His Book*, 9. Field's book is notable as a first attempt at a long form history of children's literature. Field also wrote several popular children's books, including *Bryda* (1889) and *Mixed Pickles* (1900).

¹⁰ Nineteenth-century writers seem to have chiefly used "unconscious" as the antonym of "self-conscious," and I will, in representing nineteenth-century beliefs and formulations, occasionally do the same. According to the OED, the term "unselfconscious" was in use by writers like George MacDonald and John Ruskin in the Victorian period, but as a neologism it had not yet entered general usage in the nineteenth century.

¹¹ "Children's Literature," 311.

¹² *Ibid.*, 320.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Stevenson, "A Gossip on Romance," 69.

¹⁷ Wordsworth's recommendation of fairy tales for childhood reading comes in book five of the *Prelude*; Coleridge puts them forth as ideal nursery fare in an 1813 lecture on education. Chapter Two deals with their endorsements in more detail.

¹⁸ These biases against self-reflection on the part of child protagonists and readers probably also account to some degree for the popularity of the adventure genre in the nineteenth century, with its focus on setting and event, and its terribly flat characterization. There's a reason every boy

protagonist is a cardboard cutout, and there's a reason they all seemed to be called Frank. The name gives the reader the only insight into the character that is called for: he's a frank, straightforward English boy, and there's nothing more to say.

¹⁹ Avery, *19th Century Children*, 61.

²⁰ Ibid., 150.

²¹ Taylor, *Advice to the Teens*, i, 182.

²² Child, *The Mother's Book*, 159.

²³ *Boys and Their Ways*, 320.

²⁴ Cerniglia and Mitchell, "The Business of Children in Disney's Theater," 131.

²⁵ Ibid., 131-2.

²⁶ Ibid., 132.

²⁷ For a classic analysis of the ways in which, beginning in the seventeenth century, theories of self-consciousness constituted a "transformed application of the Protestant notion of conscience," see Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*.

²⁸ Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

²⁹ Mill, *Autobiography*, 134.

³⁰ Although admittedly it is an inexact tool in many ways, a Google NGram query suggests that as a phrase "morbid self-consciousness" began rising in usage around 1820, the very period of transition in ideas about self-consciousness I have identified. Use of the phrase peaked in about 1870, a date that coincides with the high Victorian period and, unsurprisingly, the high days of Golden Age publishing. The frequency of the phrase decreased pretty steadily throughout the twentieth century, and has flatlined since 1980.

³¹ Salmon, "Special Literature," 354.

³² I take the distinction between thin and thick description from Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), and its application to literary criticism from Stephen Greenblatt's "The Touch of the Real" in his and Catherine Gallagher's *Practicing New Historicism* (2000).

³³ The spatial metaphor of surface and depth builds from Sharon Marcus and Mark Best's "Surface Reading: An Introduction," in the 2009 special issue of *Representations* titled "The Way We Read Now."

³⁴ For an incisive overview of this Latour-inspired critique of interpretive criticism, see Love, "Close but not Deep"; Williams, "The New Modesty."

³⁵ Darton, *Children's Books*, v.

³⁶ This trio of terms articulate related but differently nuanced critiques of literary-critical interpretive practices. For "symptomatic reading," see Marcus and Best's "Surface Reading." For "suspicious reading," see Felski, "After Suspicion." For "paranoid reading," see Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading."

³⁷ Trumbull, *Hints on Child-Training*, 166-7.

³⁸ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 39.

³⁹ Goldberg, *Mirror and Man*, 240.

⁴⁰ Finding children's diaries from the period is not easy. The archive presented in this chapter is comprised of diaries that were published either because they modeled forms of childhood thought and deportment thought instructive, or as a memorial to a beloved and lost child.

⁴¹ See "Books of Instruction."

⁴² Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 2.

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- ⁴³ Chesterfield, *Lord Chesterfield's Advice*, 1430.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 1431.
- ⁴⁵ Garretson, *The School of Manners*, 39.
- ⁴⁶ Barnard, *Present for an Apprentice*, 1.
- ⁴⁷ Locke, *Concerning Education*, 42.
- ⁴⁸ Trimmer, *Guardian of Education*, vol. II, 425; emphasis original.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 37.
- ⁵⁰ The photograph comes from an article by Gleeson White titled "On Photographing the Nude" in the magazine *The Photogram*.
- ⁵¹ Mavor, *Youth's Miscellany*, 225.
- ⁵² Ibid., 228.
- ⁵³ Rousseau, *Émile*, 16.
- ⁵⁴ Mavor, *Youth's Miscellany*, 231.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Terry Castle takes a different view of the masquerade, interpreting it as running on a frisson of contradiction in which the essential self is turned inside out for the night by the "come as you aren't" rule that is the masquerade's defining feature. So while for Wahrman the masquerade exemplifies the fluid nature of identity before the new regime of stable selfhood, for Castle the notion of a stable selfhood was a necessary prerequisite for the rhetoric of the masquerade. I would suggest that both theorists have it a little right, and that the masquerade's popularity indicates that at as the new regime of deep interiority began to gain ground, it at first gave rise to a sense of vertiginous play; but as stable selfhood grew into the dominant paradigm of identity, that play became too dangerously destabilizing and the masquerade suffered a quick demise, as both Castle and Wahrman note. Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*.
- ⁵⁷ Jackson, *Engines of Instruction*, 41.
- ⁵⁸ Bebbington, *Evangelicism in Modern Britain*, 44.
- ⁵⁹ Janeway, *Token for Children*, 3.
- ⁶⁰ Bebbington, *Evangelicism in Modern Britain*, 44.
- ⁶¹ Trimmer, *Guardian of Education*, vol. I, 334.
- ⁶² In his Introduction to Volume One of his five-volume edition of *The Guardian of Education*, Matthew Grenby argues for Trimmer's centrality to the establishment of children's literature as a field of its own importance: With her periodical and its observations on "the Changes which have taken place in Books for Children and Young Persons," "Trimmer was essentially inaugurating a literary canon"—and at the same time policing it (xii).
- ⁶³ All passages from *Robinson Crusoe* come from the 2001 Penguin edition, edited by John Richetti, cited in the text by page number.
- ⁶⁴ More, "History of Tom White," 8.
- ⁶⁵ Trimmer, *Guardian of Education*, vol. I, 444.
- ⁶⁶ For some fantastic examinations of the role of mirrors in culture and philosophy see Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror*; Pendergrast, *Mirror, Mirror*; Goldberg, *Mirror and Man*.
- ⁶⁷ Ryle, *Concept of Mind*, 159.
- ⁶⁸ Campe, *Elementary Dialogues*, 368. Campe uses the term "soul" where contemporary usage would dictate instead "mind"; he writes about "faculties" of the soul, including imagination, wit, etc., that we would consider faculties of the mind. Trimmer's *Easy Introduction* does the same.

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- ⁶⁹ Quotations from *The Governess* come from the 2005 Broadview edition, cited in the text by page number.
- ⁷⁰ More, *Strictures on Female Education*, 169.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., 225.
- ⁷² Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, 192.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 193.
- ⁷⁴ More, *Strictures on Female Education*, 216; emphasis original.
- ⁷⁵ Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, 176.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., 181.
- ⁷⁷ More, *Strictures on Female Education*, 216.
- ⁷⁸ Sherwood, *Fairchild Family*, 84.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., 88.
- ⁸⁰ Bennet, *Christian Oratory*, 579.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., 580.
- ⁸² Moody, *School of Good Manners*, 31.
- ⁸³ Edgeworth, *Early Lessons*, 130.
- ⁸⁴ Baggerman and Dekker, *Child of the Enlightenment*, 112.
- ⁸⁵ Wesley, "Preface," iii.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid.
- ⁸⁷ Quotations from Gilbert's journal come from the first published edition of 1768, cited by page number in the text.
- ⁸⁸ Trimmer, *Guardian of Education*, vol. V, 136; emphasis original.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid., 138.
- ⁹⁰ All quotations from Shore's journal come from the 1991 reprint edited by Barbara Timm Gates, cited by page number in the text.
- ⁹¹ Post, *Diary of Frederic Post*, 72-3.
- ⁹² Ibid., 193; emphasis original.
- ⁹³ Ibid., 193.
- ⁹⁴ Cohen, "Familiar Conversation."
- ⁹⁵ Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 108.
- ⁹⁶ Cockshut, "Children's Diaries," 382.
- ⁹⁷ Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*, 283.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., 290.
- ¹⁰⁰ For a detailed publication history of the journals and their many paratexts, see Frank Sidgwick's informative introduction to *The Complete Marjory Fleming* (1934).
- ¹⁰¹ Farnie spelled her name wrong and invented the nickname "Pet," which does not seem to have been in use by her family. Significantly, however, her tombstone is inscribed "Pet Marjorie": the myth eclipsed the child.
- ¹⁰² Fleming, *Complete Marjory Fleming*, 1.21.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid., 3.121.
- ¹⁰⁴ Macbean, *Story of Pet Marjorie*, 1.
- ¹⁰⁵ Stephen, "Margaret Fleming."
- ¹⁰⁶ Plotz, "Pet of Letters"; *Vocation of Childhood*, 32.
- ¹⁰⁷ Twain, "Marjorie Fleming," 1182.

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- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁹ Macbean, *Marjorie Fleming's Book*, xiii.
- ¹¹⁰ Avery, "Intimations of Mortality," 108.
- ¹¹¹ Plotz, "Pet of Letters," 5.
- ¹¹² Quoted in Coleridge, *Inquiring Spirit*, 87.
- ¹¹³ My use of the terms "Romantic" and "Romanticism" is strategic, and the terms are employed for the sake of simplicity, with every reservation. For critiques of the concept that there exists any unified bloc we could call a singular "Romanticism," see McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*; Copley and Whale, *Beyond Romanticism*; Butler, "Romanticism in England."
- ¹¹⁴ Coleridge, *Inquiring Spirit*, 87.
- ¹¹⁵ Lamb, *Letters of Lamb*, 76.
- ¹¹⁶ Wordsworth, *Letters of Wordsworth*, 287.
- ¹¹⁷ qtd in Rothwell, "Classic Film Versions," 242.
- ¹¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁹ Bloom, *Hamlet*, xii.
- ¹²⁰ Eliot's 1919 essay "Hamlet and his Problems" declares the play a failure and accuses its admirers, including Goethe and Coleridge, of liking it solely because they project their own character onto the protagonist.
- ¹²¹ Ibid., xv.
- ¹²² Bate, *Romantics on Shakespeare*, 2.
- ¹²³ To be clear, I am not making an argument about what Hamlet is—only an argument about what he has meant to others, and what his meaning to them can do to illuminate the course of thought on self-consciousness in the long nineteenth century.
- ¹²⁴ Quoted in Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art*, 90.
- ¹²⁵ Ibid., 308.
- ¹²⁶ Ibid., 309.
- ¹²⁷ Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art*, 307.
- ¹²⁸ Coleridge, "Characteristics of Shakespear," 136.
- ¹²⁹ Ibid., 135.
- ¹³⁰ Hazlitt, *Shakespear's Plays*, 325.
- ¹³¹ Byron, "The Character of Hamlet," 338.
- ¹³² Shelley, "The Character of Hamlet," 342.
- ¹³³ It is probably worth noting here that the Romantic consensus on Hamlet wasn't perfect. Goethe, for instance, while still seeing the play as a masterful depiction of a self-conscious mind, doesn't understand that state to be Hamlet's natural inheritance. When Wilhelm Meister takes on the part of Hamlet, he explicates the character at length, arguing for a Hamlet burdened by an unnatural self-consciousness not native to the prince but imposed by the awful events that befall him.
- ¹³⁴ Hazlitt, *Shakespear's Plays*, 232.
- ¹³⁵ Coleridge, *Table Talk*, 161. One sees where Eliot finds the impetus for his criticism.
- ¹³⁶ Greenberg, *Hamlet Vocation*, xi.
- ¹³⁷ Lamb, "Tragedies of Shakespeare," 115.
- ¹³⁸ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III.i.83.
- ¹³⁹ Garber, *Shakespeare After All*, 475. Though it has been overwhelmingly influential in the years since the early nineteenth century, the Romantic vision of Hamlet as a hero of modern

subjectivity and self-consciousness need not be thought of as a triumphant recognition of the truth of the play. Romantic criticism *made* the self-conscious Hamlet, and for the most part successfully persuaded subsequent readers of Hamlet to read him and his soliloquies—particularly the “To be, or not to be” speech—as evidence of self-consciousness. Contrary evidence could be and is asserted; for example, Stephen Bygrave points out that in the “To be, or not to be” soliloquy, Hamlet “speaks twelve lines entirely of infinitives, without using the word ‘I.’” Bygrave, *Coleridge and Self*, 8.

¹⁴⁰ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II.2.524-6.

¹⁴¹ Certainly not all children exposed to Shakespeare’s text of the play were inevitably paralyzed with self-consciousness as a result. Louisa May Alcott, who enjoyed a thoroughly Romantic childhood of solitary rambling when in the country and sleeping out with the begging children when in the city, recalls putting on productions of Hamlet with her siblings. Though she says he was her favorite hero, and was played by them with the “gloomy glare and tragic stalk” of an introspective Romantic Hamlet, she reports no attacks of morbid self-reflection as a result of her theatrical predilections. Alcott, “Recollections of Childhood,” 261.

¹⁴² Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art*, 307.

¹⁴³ Coleridge, “Characteristics of Shakespear,” 135.

¹⁴⁴ Byron, “Character of Hamlet,” 336.

¹⁴⁵ I will have a great deal more to say about Schiller as this chapter unfolds.

¹⁴⁶ Of course, even as Charles Lamb was suppressing in his children’s version the parts of Hamlet that made him the ultimate symbol of self-consciousness for Lamb and his contemporaries, others were enthusiastically celebrating the conjunction of childhood and *Hamlet* in the form of Young Roscius. Child actor William Henry West Betty was known both as “the Young Roscius” and “Master Betty,” and thrilled British audiences from his debut in 1804 (just three years before Lamb’s *Hamlet*) at age eleven, playing, among other Shakespearean parts, the role of Hamlet.

¹⁴⁷ Bygrave, *Coleridge and Self*, vii.

¹⁴⁸ Ferrara, *Modernity and Authenticity*, 69.

¹⁴⁹ For more on the intertwining issues of education and subjectivity in the Romantic period, see Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism*.

¹⁵⁰ “The child,” of course, is a cultural construct, separate from and never identical to historical children. I will continue to use the phrase “the child” in this chapter because, as has been well-documented by scholars, the Romantic discourse on childhood often had more to do with this imagined figure than with actual children. Following chapters will consider the implications and outcomes for real children of this Romantic tendency to glom on to “the child.” For more on “the child” as a figure in Romantic literature and culture, see [insert those critics who aren’t coming to mind just now].

¹⁵¹ Forbes, *Sincerity’s Shadow*, 7.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁵⁴ Though plenty of scholars offer correctives to a critical tendency to locate the “birth of the individual” too simplistically in one era or another, Dror Warhman makes a deeply convincing case for seeing the late eighteenth century as the moment when a truly modern sense of deep interior selfhood emerges, a case that does not overlook the work of scholars who locate the emergence of individualism much earlier. For instance, critics including Stephen Greenblatt and

Paul Delany argue that we must recognize a form of Renaissance self-consciousness. The new self-regard of the Renaissance was born out of the man's post-feudal ability to imagine himself in other roles, changing identities, which gives rise to the image of the world as a stage. (See Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*; Delany, *British Autobiography*, 11-17.) My sense is that pinpointing the emergence of the individual is less important for my purposes than tracking the ways in which a burgeoning focus on selfhood and self-consciousness eventually leads to new ways of considering childhood beginning with the end of the eighteenth century.

¹⁵⁵ Kleist, Letter to Rühle von Lilienstern, 42.

¹⁵⁶ Kleist, "Marionette Theater," 24.

¹⁵⁷ Locke, *Thoughts Concerning Education*, 42.

¹⁵⁸ Kleist, "Marionette Theater," 24.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁶⁰ Hazlitt, *Round Table*, 88.

¹⁶¹ Passages from Rousseau's *Confessions* come from *The Essential Writings of Rousseau*, translated by Peter Constantine, and cited by page number in the text.

¹⁶² Wordsworth, *Prelude*, V.292.

¹⁶³ Quotations from *Émile* come from Barbara Foxley's 1974 translation, cited by page number in the text.

¹⁶⁴ All quotations from "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry" derive from Helen Watanabe O'Kelly's 1981 translation, cited in the text by page number.

¹⁶⁵ Boas, *Cult of Childhood*, 72.

¹⁶⁶ As Anne Mellor points out, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) gives us a powerful representation of this desire in the character of Dr. Frankenstein: Mellor, "Usurping the Female." See also Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*.

¹⁶⁷ Coleridge, *Inquiring Spirit*, 142.

¹⁶⁸ Forbes, *Sincerity's Shadow*, 8.

¹⁶⁹ O'Neill, *Self-Conscious Poem*.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁷¹ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 251.

¹⁷² Coleridge, *Frost at Midnight*, 9.

¹⁷³ qtd. in Taylor, *Coleridge's Writings*, 23.

¹⁷⁴ Hazlitt, *The Round Table*, 92.

¹⁷⁵ For an excellent reading of this passage of the *Prelude*, see Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, 13.

¹⁷⁶ Plotz, *Vocation of Childhood*, 17.

¹⁷⁷ All quotations from the *Prelude*, unless otherwise noted, are from the 1805 text and derive from the 1979 Norton edition, cited in the text by book and verse.

¹⁷⁸ Barrie, *Peter Pan and Wendy*, 157.

¹⁷⁹ Plotz, *Vocation of Childhood*, 56.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁸¹ Field, *Child and His Book*, 8-9.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 331.

¹⁸⁵ Darton, *Children's Books in England*, 221.

¹⁸⁶ Lurie, Preface to *Holiday House*, vi. For more recent scholarship that reconsiders the book's reputation as giving us a vision of purely Romantic childhood, see Hoffman's "*Holiday House, Childhood, and Time*" and Horne's "Punishment as Performance in Catherine Sinclair's *Holiday House*."

¹⁸⁷ Quotations from *Holiday House* come from the 1976 Garland facsimile reprint of the first edition, and will be cited in text by page number.

¹⁸⁸ Hoffman, "*Holiday House, Childhood, Time*."

¹⁸⁹ Passages from *The Fairy Bower* come from the original 1841 edition, and will be cited by page number in the text.

¹⁹⁰ Ingham, "Tyrants," 306.

¹⁹¹ Wordsworth, "Happy Warrior," 76.

¹⁹² Schiller, "Naïve and Sentimental," 21.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Burnett, who grew up in England but spent her adulthood in America, wrote such children's classics as *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886), *A Little Princess* (1905), and *The Secret Garden* (1911).

¹⁹⁵ Burnett, *One I Knew*, 1.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 114.

¹⁹⁹ Adye, "Old-fashioned Children," 287. For more on Victorian old-fashioned children, see Nelson, Claudia. *Precocious Children & Childish Adults: Age Inversion in Victorian Literature*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2012.

²⁰⁰ Green, "Golden Age," 43.

²⁰¹ Carroll, *Letters of Lewis Carroll*, 236. Emphasis original. Bowman was fifteen at the time she performed in *Richard III* at London's Globe Theatre; at the age of fourteen she had played Alice in the 1888 revival of the musical adaptation of the Alice books. See note 23 for more on the stage adaptations of the Alice books.

²⁰² Ingham, "Tyrants of the Nineteenth," 306.

²⁰³ Ibid., 311.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 307.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ For scholarship on this controversy see Auerbach, *Private Theatricals*; Gubar, "Drama of Precocity"; and Varty, *Children and Theatre*.

²⁰⁷ Though I will occasionally reference particular versions of Peter as he appears in different print sources or as embodied by specific performers, generally when I refer to "Peter" I mean a figure collectively imagined by Barrie, his collaborators, and his Edwardian audience.

²⁰⁸ Barrie, *Peter and Wendy*, 130.

²⁰⁹ Anderson, *Powers of Distance*, 4.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid., 20.

²¹² Mill, *Autobiography*, 142.

²¹³ Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 85.

²¹⁴ Quotations from "Characteristics" come from the 1831 *Collected Works* of Carlyle, and will be cited in the text by page number.

²¹⁵ Tarr, "Carlyle and J. M. Barrie." Tarr also suggests that the contest between Peter and Hook is an analogue for Barrie's own self-imposed rivalry with Carlyle, so that the reportedly impotent and avowedly rooster-hating Carlyle becomes the effeminate Hook who is confounded by the crowing Peter Pan.

²¹⁶ Barrie, "A Small Lath," 37.

²¹⁷ Mill, "Bentham," 355.

²¹⁸ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 63.

²¹⁹ Carlyle, "Characteristics," 325.

²²⁰ Mill, *Autobiography*, 149.

²²¹ Alexander, *Arnold and Mill*, 112.

²²² Mill, *Inaugural Address*, 17.

²²³ "Worship of Children," 11.

²²⁴ Herford, *Book of Bores*, 40.

²²⁵ The stage adaptation of the first Alice book had its debut at the Royal Polytechnic Institute in London in 1876, and a musical version of both books combined ran from December of 1886 to March of 1887 at the Prince of Wales Theatre in London before being revived at London's Globe Theatre from December of 1888 to February of 1889, and frequently thereafter for the London Christmas season. *Little Lord Fauntleroy* debuted at the Prince of Wales in London in February of 1888. The stage version of *A Little Princess*, originally titled *A Little Unfair Princess*, opened in London in December of 1902, with the shortened title instated for the New York opening at the Criterion Theatre in January of 1903.

²²⁶ See Gubar, "*The Children's Pinafore*"; Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*.

²²⁷ For more on private theatricals in British culture, see Russell, "Private Theatricals." Several writers published collections of plays for children to perform, often accompanied by instructions for the juvenile performers. *Amateur Theatricals* (1879) is entirely composed of detailed instructions for child actors; the volume begins with a defense of child performance that seems to register some of the contemporary anxieties about children, performance, and self-consciousness. The authors imagine spectators at one of these productions accusing parents of exposing their children to the perils of acting, including over-excitement and the creation of vanity in the child. The Pollocks counter that to the contrary, acting teaches children sympathy with others; rather than regard themselves as objects of the audience's attention, the children must project their awareness outward toward the audience in order to please their spectators. Some such books do not even bother with addressing the possibility of acting inducing self-consciousness in children. Florence Bell's *Fairy Plays and How to Act Them* (1896) and Kate Krieglgrath-Kroeker's *Alice and Other Fairy Plays for Children* (1811) confine their remarks to matters of scenery effects, proper elocution, and dance steps (perhaps because the genre of fantasy is assumed once more to preclude the danger of self-consciousness-inducing performativity).

²²⁸ See Rose, *Case of Peter Pan.*; Auerbach, *Private Theatricals*; Varty, *Children and Theatre*; Gubar, "The Drama of Precocity"; Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*; Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*.

²²⁹ Wordsworth, "Intimations of Immortality," 102.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 107. For other readings of the "little Actor" in the context of theatrical children, see Auerbach, *Private Theatricals*, 35; and Varty, *Children and Theatre*, 12.

²³¹ See Gubar, "The Drama of Precocity," in which she demonstrates that "child performers appealed to diverse audiences by exhibiting extreme precocity" (64).

²³² Quotations from “The Child on the Stage,” which appeared in the *Ludgate Illustrated Magazine*, will be cited in the text by page numbers.

²³³ The play debuted on December 27, 1904, at the Duke of York’s Theatre in London, with Nina Boucicault playing the role of Peter. The production, attended by adults and children largely of the middle classes, was a resounding success, and was revived every Christmas season for decades, with a succession of popular adult actresses playing Peter. The play also became a beloved holiday tradition, albeit to a lesser extent, in America, where it debuted on Broadway in 1905 with Maude Adams playing Peter.

²³⁴ Quoted in Green, *Fifty Years*, 73.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 202.

²³⁶ Quotations from the text of Barrie’s play *Peter Pan* come from the 2005 Oxford reprint of the original 1928 publication, and will be cited by page number and the designation *PP* in the text. Quotations from the 1911 novel *Peter and Wendy*, which Barrie based on the play, come from the Penguin edition of 2004, and will be cited in the text by page number and the designation *PW*. The textual history of the Peter Pan texts, in all its dazzling complexity, has been well documented by scholars such as Peter Hollindale, and I will not rehearse it here, but it is worth noting that Barrie referred to the novel when composing the play as it was first published in 1928, so that these two texts share many features not necessarily present in performances of the play. Because of the close ties between these two texts—novel and published play script—I will occasionally use the novel to talk about issues of performance and theatricality.

²³⁷ Quoted in Green, *Fifty Years*, 105. That Barrie instructed the performers to ignore the audience is especially curious given that *Peter Pan* contains one of the most famous instances of audience participation in theater history. Peter implores the audience to clap to save Tinkerbell, and by all reports it seems that they always do.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ Green, *Fifty Years*, 90-1, emphasis mine.

²⁴⁰ Varty, “Locating Never Land,” 398.

²⁴¹ Fox, “Time of His Life,” 26.

²⁴² Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 88. Steedman’s point is not that Freud single-handedly invented this child-as-history-as-inner-self theory, but rather that he gave the clearest instantiation of a kind of understanding that had been developing over the nineteenth century. I will have more to say about Freud’s uses of the child in the epilogue.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ Coats, “Child-hating: *Peter Pan*,” 42.

²⁴⁵ Chapter Four will consider the connections between good form, the public schools, and unselfconsciousness at length.

²⁴⁶ Freud, “The Uncanny.”

²⁴⁷ The conjunction of the putting out of the little house-lights, which stand in for the mother’s eyes, with the description of Peter as uncanny, makes one wonder if Freud and Barrie were reading one another at some point, as Freud’s essay on the uncanny revolves around a reading of a Hoffman story featuring a paranoia about the loss of eyesight.

²⁴⁸ Plotz, *Vocation of Childhood*, 79.

²⁴⁹ Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, 12.

²⁵⁰ Plotz, *Vocation of Childhood*, 79.

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- ²⁵¹ Barrie, *Peter and Wendy*, 117. All quotations are from the 2004 Penguin edition of Barrie's 1911 novel, and will henceforth be cited in the text by page number.
- ²⁵² Mack, *Public Schools*. For the history of the British public school, see Gathorne-Hardy, *Old School Tie*; Chandos, *Boys Together*; and Reed, *Old School Ties*.
- ²⁵³ Coleridge, *Public School Education*, 95.
- ²⁵⁴ On the multifarious construction that is the "gentleman," see Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints*; Berberich, *Image of the Gentleman*.
- ²⁵⁵ Stephen "Gentlemen" 336.
- ²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 337.
- ²⁵⁷ Mozley, "On Manners," 159-60; emphasis original.
- ²⁵⁸ Kingsley, *Letters and Memoires*, 443.
- ²⁵⁹ The women of the middle classes too turned to manuals for training in proper feminine behavior; see Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*.
- ²⁶⁰ Giroaurd, *Return to Camelot*, 19. For additional scholarship on Victorian medievalism, see Alexander, *Medievalism*; Boos, *History and Community*; Palmgren and Holloway, *Beyond Arthurian Romances*.
- ²⁶¹ Scott, "Essay on Chivalry," 49. Scott's playfulness in his medieval novels—particularly in the prefaces—indicates that he himself was aware of the nineteenth-century revival of medievalism as a kind of self-conscious theatricality, but his readers recast his medievalism as earnest and historically accurate.
- ²⁶² The poem is "The Armenian Lady's Love," the narrative of which Wordsworth borrowed from one of Digby's tales of knightly rectitude.
- ²⁶³ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 279 n. 1.
- ²⁶⁴ Digby, *Broad Stone of Honour*, xxix.
- ²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, xxxvi.
- ²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.
- ²⁶⁷ Newbolt, *Book of the Happy Warrior*, vii.
- ²⁶⁸ Bryden, *Reinventing King Arthur*, 82. For more scholarship on the Victorian Arthur, see Girouard, *Return to Camelot*; Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity*. Arthur was revived by Victorian poets (Alfred Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, William Morris), artists (Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones), and children's authors (Dinah Mulock, Howard Pyle), among many others.
- ²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.
- ²⁷⁰ For a detailed genealogy of Robin Hood tales in the nineteenth century, see Carpenter, "Robin Hood." For further scholarship on the nineteenth-century Robin Hood, see ; Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity*; Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*; Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study*; Brockman, "Robin Hood."
- ²⁷¹ For more on the literary evolution of Robin Hood from yeoman to peer, see Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study*; Brockman, "Robin Hood."
- ²⁷² The late eighteenth century saw an antiquarianism-inspired interest in collecting and imitating ballads. In fact, though the title page of *Robin Hood and His Merry Forresters* lists the author as Stephen Percy (and I will refer to him thus in the text), that name is the nom de plume of one Joseph Cundall, who probably chose Percy as pen-name in order to ride on the coattails of the successful ballad collection *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) by Thomas Percy. Other well-known participants in the ballad craze include Sir Walter Scott (*Minstrelsy of the Scottish*

Border, 1802-3) and James Macpherson, who published his own imitations as the work of a fictional balladeer he called Ossian in the 1760s. See Friedman, *The Ballad Revival*; Dugaw, “Marketing of ‘Old Ballads’”; Trumpener, “End of an Auld Sang.”

²⁷³ Quotations from Fenn’s *Young Robin Hood* derive from a 1900 American edition published the year after the novel was released in England. Passages from the book will be cited in the text by page number.

²⁷⁴ Egan, *Robin Hood*, 6.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁷⁶ Marsh, *Life and Adventures*, iv.

²⁷⁷ Twain, *Tom Sawyer*, 62.

²⁷⁸ Tom plays robbers by the book too, as seen when he insists that all the books show that robbers are polite and noble at heart—a trope out of sentimental literature. Tom’s imaginary outside of play is also dominated by “the book”; when he imagines himself dead and all his detractors crying over their cruelty to him, the scene he depicts to himself comes straight out of the sentimental tale of the dying child: “He pictured himself lying sick unto death and his aunt bending over him beseeching one little forgiving word, but he would turn his face to the wall, and die with that word unsaid. Ah, how would she feel then?” (*Tom* 25). In contrast, the illiterate Huck Finn remains a paragon of unselfconsciousness. Huck is more than a little wary of how Tom gets all of his play out of “pirate books, and robber books” and so on (*Huck* 10). The consequences for Tom are dire (if unspecified) if they don’t play by the book: “Do you want to go to doing different from what’s in the books, and get things all muddled up?” (*Huck* 11). Books have all the authority: “Don’t you reckon that the people that made the books knows what’s the correct thing to do? Do you reckon *you* can learn ‘em anything? Not by a good deal” (*Huck* 11). Huck, however, doesn’t “give a dead rat what the authorities” have to say. (*Huck* 307). Even though the premise of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is that Huck is writing the book that the reader holds, by the end Huck still has no use for books: “there ain’t nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I’d a knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn’t a tackled it and ain’t agoing to no more” (*Huck* 362). His objections to the literary, and his consequent unselfconsciousness, put Huck much more in line with the ideals of chivalry, and the ideals of nineteenth-century childhood, than Tom Sawyer. For more on Tom’s Robin Hood game, see: Yongue, “Play’s the Thing.”

²⁷⁹ Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys*, 22.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 212.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² Boone, *Youth of Darkest England*, 123-4.

²⁸³ Can’t find this in the Oxford edition...but it exists in an online version I found (that is nearly impossible to cite) and is too good to leave out so I’m just going to have to figure it out.

²⁸⁴ Newbolt, *Happy Warrior*, 277.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 283; Troy Boone has, however, shown that Scouting was never terribly popular with lower class boys, so most likely Baden-Powell merely managed to further entrench the cult of chivalry in a field already thoroughly occupied by it.

²⁸⁶ Girouard, *Return to Camelot*, 168.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁸⁸ Quotations from *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* refer to the 2008 Oxford edition, and will be cited in the text by page number.

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- ²⁸⁹ Farrar, *Eric*, 13.
- ²⁹⁰ "School Tales," *Church Quarterly Review*, 376.
- ²⁹¹ Farrar, *Eric*, 12.
- ²⁹² *Ibid.*, 29.
- ²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 282.
- ²⁹⁴ Mack, *Public Schools and British Opinion*, 16.
- ²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.
- ²⁹⁶ *Saturday Review*, 6 November 1858, 453.
- ²⁹⁷ Coleridge, *Inquiring Spirit*, 87.
- ²⁹⁸ *Saturday Review*, 6 November 1858, 453.
- ²⁹⁹ Farrar, *St. Winifred's*, 12.
- ³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.
- ³⁰¹ Quotations from *The Harrovians* come from the fourth edition of 1914, and will be cited in the text by page number.
- ³⁰² Stephen, "Tom Brown's Schooldays," 191.
- ³⁰³ Lyttleton, Review of *The Loom of Youth*, 661.
- ³⁰⁴ In the reference to the "small friend system," Hughes appears to concede that fagging, a public school practice in which a younger boy acts as a servant to an older boy, did sometimes accommodate sexual encounters between students, whether voluntary or coerced. The language Hughes uses, however, is so oblique as to be of doubtful meaning to anyone not already a public school insider.
- ³⁰⁵ Hutchison, Preface to *Fifth Form*, 6.
- ³⁰⁶ Kipling, *Stalky & Co.*, 124.
- ³⁰⁷ Vachell, *The Hill*, 11.
- ³⁰⁸ Wodehouse, *The White Feather*, 121.
- ³⁰⁹ Gathorne-Hardy, *The Old School Tie*, 219.
- ³¹⁰ Mason, *The Four Feathers*, 36.
- ³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 126.
- ³¹² *Ibid.*, 203.
- ³¹³ Gathorne-Hardy, *Old School Tie*, 226.
- ³¹⁴ "Public School Education," *Quarterly Review*, 421, 422.
- ³¹⁵ The extent of Dr. Arnold's actual reforms has been disputed, but certainly his name remains attached to a particular shift in the public school ethos away from aristocratic indulgence toward middle-class piety and industry.
- ³¹⁶ Stephen, "Tom Brown's Schooldays," 185.
- ³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 188, 189.
- ³¹⁸ Review of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, *Times* 9 October 1857, 10.
- ³¹⁹ Review of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, *North British Review*, 134. Emphasis original.
- ³²⁰ Chandos, *Boys Together*, 265, 263.
- ³²¹ Mack, *Public Schools and British Opinion*, 17.
- ³²² Lewes, *Clough: The Critical Heritage*, 155.
- ³²³ *Ibid.*, 155.
- ³²⁴ Lewes, "Clough's Life and Poems," 412, 411.
- ³²⁵ Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, 204.
- ³²⁶ Chorley, *Arthur Hugh Clough*, 30.

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- ³²⁷ Kenny, "Biographical Introduction," xix.
- ³²⁸ Barrie, "Hook at Eton," 16.
- ³²⁹ Ibid.
- ³³⁰ For more on reactions against the Little Lord Fauntleroy craze, see Clark, *Kiddie Lit*, 16-31; Paoletti, *Pink and Blue*, 60-84.
- ³³¹ "Boy of Today."
- ³³² According to Anne Higonnet, *Blue Boy* was "one of the most-reproduced images of the nineteenth century, and by the time it sold for \$700,000 in 1921 it was the most famous painting in the world." Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence*, 46.
- ³³³ Apparently even at the height of Fauntleroy's popularity, the media criticized Burnett for dressing her sons in copies of his costumes enough that she responded by denying that her taste for picturesque children "has not led me to transform to strong, manly, robust boys into affected, abnormally self-conscious little mountebanks." Quoted in Thwaite, *Waiting for the Party*, 85.
- ³³⁴ Beffel, "The Fauntleroy Plague."
- ³³⁵ "Lock-out Time" is the title of the chapter of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* in which Peter flies home to find the nursery window barred and his mother no mourning his loss but rather sleeping happily beside a new child.
- ³³⁶ Freud, "An Infantile Neurosis," 12.
- ³³⁷ Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 4.
- ³³⁸ Freud, "An Infantile Neurosis," 9. All quotations from the Wolf Man case refer to "An Infantile Neurosis" in volume 17 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, and henceforth will be cited in the text by page number.
- ³³⁹ Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia," 148.
- ³⁴⁰ Ibid., 6.
- ³⁴¹ Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 262.
- ³⁴² Freud, "Psychopathic Characters," 310; Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 264.

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